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GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation
LITERARY CRITICISM IN STEVENSON

by
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(A.B., U. of New Hampshire, 1929; A.M., Columbia University, 1930)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

1939

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TOPICAL OUTLINE

I. GENERAL THEORIES CONCERNING ART AND THE ARTIST - p. 1

- A. Definition of Art - p. 1
- B. Aims of Art - p. 6
- C. Relation of Art to Life - p. 10
- D. Morality in Art - p. 14
- E. Realism and Idealism - p. 18
- F. Art as a Career - p. 23

1. Necessary Qualifications for Such a Career - p. 23

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Professor of English

- A. Definition of Literature - p. 46
- B. The Gift of Reading - p. 50
- C. Realism - p. 53
- D. Imagism - p. 61
- E. Writing as a Profession - p. 66
- F. Learning to Write - p. 72

1. Initiation - p. 73
2. Theory of Work - p. 77
3. Use of the Imagination - p. 83
4. Use of Recollection - p. 88
5. Collaboration - p. 92

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- E. Realism and Idealism - p. 18
- F. Art as a Career - p. 23
 - 1. Necessary Qualifications for Such a Career - p. 23
 - 2. The Value of Aspiration in the Artist - p. 29
 - 3. The Exclusive Artist - p. 33
 - 4. Notes for the Student of Any Art - p. 37

II. GENERAL THEORIES CONCERNING LITERATURE AND THE WRITER -p.42

- A. Definition of Literature - p. 42
- B. Aims of Literature - p. 46
- C. The Gift of Reading - p. 50
- D. Realism - p. 53
- E. Romance - p. 61
- F. Writing as a Profession - p. 66
- G. Learning to Write - p. 72
 - 1. Imitation - p. 73
 - 2. Theory of Work - p. 77
 - 3. Use of the Imagination - p. 83
 - 4. Use of Recollection - p. 88
 - 5. Collaboration - p. 92

TOPICAL OUTLINE

I. GENERAL THEORIES CONCERNING ART AND THE ARTIST - p. 1

A. Definition of Art - p. 1

B. Aims of Art - p. 6

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D. Morality in Art - p. 14

E. Realism and Idealism - p. 18

F. Art as a Career - p. 23

1. Necessary Qualifications for Such a Career - p. 23

2. The Value of Aspiration in the Artist - p. 29

3. The Exclusive Artist - p. 33

4. Notes for the Student of Art - p. 37

II. GENERAL THEORIES CONCERNING LITERATURE AND THE WRITER - p. 42

A. Definition of Literature - p. 42

B. Aims of Literature - p. 46

C. The Gift of Reading - p. 50

D. Realism - p. 53

E. Romance - p. 61

F. Writing as a Profession - p. 66

G. Learning to Write - p. 73

1. Imitation - p. 73

2. Theory of Work - p. 77

3. Use of the Imagination - p. 83

4. Use of Recollection - p. 88

5. Collaboration - p. 92

III. THEORY OF NARRATIVE - p. 95

- A. Definition of Narrative - p. 95
- B. The Genesis of "The Master of Ballantrae" - p. 100
- C. Narrative Technique with Particular Relation to the Novel and the Short Story - p. 104
 - 1. The Novel - p. 104
 - a. Plot - p. 118
 - (1) Sub-Plot - p. 123
 - (2) Dreams as an Aid in Plot Structure - p. 124
 - b. Character - p. 129
 - c. Setting - p. 144
 - d. Point of View in Narrative - p. 152
 - e. Description - p. 154
 - 2. The Short Story - p. 156
- D. Other Narrative Types Discussed by Stevenson - p. 159
 - 1. Biography - p. 159
 - 2. History - p. 163
 - 3. The Drama - p. 165
 - 4. The Fable - p. 168
 - 5. The Ballad - p. 171

IV. STYLE - p. 172

- A. Technical Elements of Style - p. 174
- B. Narrative Style - p. 185

III. THEORY OF NARRATIVE - p. 92

- A. Definition of Narrative - p. 92
- B. The Genesis of "The Master of Ballantrae" - p. 100
- C. Narrative Technique with Particular Relation to the Novel and the Short Story - p. 104
 - 1. The Novel - p. 104
 - a. Plot - p. 118
 - (1) Sub-plot - p. 123
 - (2) Dreams as an Aid in Plot Structure - p. 124
 - b. Character - p. 129
 - c. Setting - p. 144
 - d. Point of View in Narrative - p. 152
 - e. Description - p. 154
 - 2. The Short Story - p. 156
- D. Other Narrative Types Discussed by Stevenson - p. 159
 - 1. Biography - p. 163
 - 2. History - p. 163
 - 3. The Drama - p. 165
 - 4. The Fable - p. 168
 - 5. The Ballad - p. 171

IV. STYLE - p. 172

- A. Technical Elements of Style - p. 174
- B. Narrative Style - p. 185

V. THE ART OF CRITICISM - p. 190

- A. Attributes Which the Critic Should Possess - p. 190
- B. Limitations Inherent in the Short Critical Essay
- p. 197
- C. Stevenson's Reaction to Criticism - p. 200
- D. Criticism of Prose Writers by Stevenson - p. 204

VI. CONCLUSION - p. 295

- A. Resume of Stevenson's Critical Opinions - p. 295
- B. Stevenson's Critical Theory and Practice - p. 314

VII. A DIGEST OF THE DISSERTATIONS - p. 325

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY - p. 332

IX. WRITER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY - p. 338

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B. Limitations Inherent in the Short Critical Essay
- p. 197

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FOREWORD

Stevenson has been the subject of any number of semester or term papers and masters' theses, ranging from Stevenson as an Interpreter of Life to Position of the Adverb Only in the Prose of Stevenson. Ruth Goodrich has written A Comparative Study of the Narrative of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Robert Louis Stevenson; Angelina Gregory has written Stevenson's Development as a Narrative Writer; Elizabeth E. Cornall has made a study of Stevenson as a critic of his contemporaries; M. L. Jenson has written an essay on Stevenson as a Writer of Narrative; and Aram Torossian has offered a study of seventeen pages on Stevenson as a Literary Critic. Robert Allison has studied plot and character in Stevenson; Sister Dolorosa Canfield has written an essay called The Craftmanship of the Short Story as Revealed by Stevenson in his Essays; and Ella H. Borchard and Levi Ames Brown have analyzed Stevenson's essays. Stevenson and Fine Arts: the Aesthetic Career of a Literary Stylist was written by Thomas Kimber, and Ruth Victoria Milbrandt has chosen A Comparative Study of the Style of Stevenson and Pater as her subject. A. Conan Doyle has contributed an essay of eleven pages called Mr. Stevenson's Methods in Fiction, and Jerome Canady Hixon has written a master's essay on Stevenson's literary principles as derived from the forces

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Henry James, after having made the remark that there is nothing he should like better than to make a study of Stevenson's "literary opinions," adds, "Here is a whole little circle of discussion, yet such a circle that to engage one's self at all is to be too much engulfed." Mr. James is right. There is more "meat" scattered through all of Stevenson's works, including his letters, than Stevenson himself probably would have surmised; and this thesis is perforce limited to a consideration of prose writing, with special bearing on prose technique.

The method I have followed has been the same throughout the body of this thesis. I have gone directly to Stevenson for information, collecting all his critical literary opinions, as Henry James calls them, analyzing them, systematizing them into a comprehensive outline and drawing conclusions.

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I. General Theories Concerning Art and the Artist

A. Definition of Art

In view of the fact that Stevenson, while talking of the lowly fable, remarks that it is too important a branch of creative literature to be defined dogmatically without the loss of all that is most suggestive in it, one feels rather daring and presumptuous in attempting to pin him down to a definition of the whole broad field of art. He gives hints and suggestions here and there which can be patched into a definition of sorts, but it must be admitted that, at best, it is a bald, succinct definition, showing art in its work dress without benefit of its party accoutrements. It is rather a statement of what art is in its fundamental principles and reduced to the simplest terms of analysis than a comprehensive definition of art with its vast implication.

To attack this problem of "pyramiding" a definition, it seems pertinent to start by mentioning that Stevenson thinks that art precedes science, since, as he reasons, men must interest themselves in certain things before they start examining and analyzing them. And, again, art travels far ahead

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of language.

"The fact is that art is working far ahead of language as well as of science, realizing for us, by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for which as yet we have no direct name, for the reason that these effects do not enter very largely into the necessities of life." 1

Stevenson divides all the arts into two great classes: the representative group, which includes literature, sculpture, painting, and acting; and the presentative class, which is self-sufficient, and includes music, architecture, and the dance. It is evident that the two classes are governed by vastly different sets of laws and principles, but, in the final analysis, there is one law which is common to both groups; there is one rule which completely erases the dividing line between the two classes, and with which all arts must comply. First and last, every art must create a pattern of some sort.

"It may be said with sufficient justice that the motive and end of any art whatever is to make a pattern; a pattern, it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines; but still a pattern. That is the plane on which these sisters meet; it is by this that they are arts; and if it be well that they should at times forget their childish origin, addressing their intelligence to virile tasks, and performing unconsciously that necessary function of their life, to make a pattern, it is still imperative that the pattern shall be made." 2

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In other words, no art, however untrammelled by laws it may appear, is really free beyond certain limits. The poet's fancy may soar to whatever unbounded regions it desires, but the poet himself must keep his feet on the ground; in actual execution he must conform to the laws of prosody. So is it with the painter who cannot afford to disregard the principles of perspective, for one thing, so with the man of letters who cannot overlook the technical principles involved in style, and so is it with all artists.

If a man voluntarily decides to devote his entire life to the practice of an art, it follows that the practice must be a pleasure to him. And the second point in our definition is that art is a pleasure which the artist turns into a trade.

"Literature--painting--all art, are no other than pleasures which we turn into trades."1

"For art is, first of all and last of all, a trade."2

On one occasion, Stevenson even went so far as to compare the artist, living by a pleasure, to the "Daughters of Joy" of France. It is interesting to know that he later modified the comparison after Richard Le Gallienne had pointed out to him that "the essence is in the sale," but it is still

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more interesting to know that to the end of his life he looked on art as a pleasure. And, incidentally, this statement of his that art is a pleasure is apt to be misleading. The logical interpretation is that the speaker looks on art as an amusing, frivolous pastime suitable for moments of relaxation, as interpretation which would miss the mark entirely. Art is definitely a pleasure, but it just as definitely is not a pastime; and if the artist finds pleasure in its practice, it is because he is so devoted to it, so interested in furthering its advancement that, to him, pleasure and hard work are exactly synonymous.

By calling the pursuit of an art a trade, Stevenson means that the artist, even though he might be a genius, has to learn the use of his tools step by step just as conscientiously and just as consciously as if he were preparing to become a trained mechanic. Stevenson, by the way, once had an argument on this very subject with his friend and erstwhile teacher, Fleeming Jenkin, who took the negative against Stevenson's affirmative that writing is a real craft. And in spite of his misgivings concerning his ability to convince the skeptic, Stevenson succeeded so well that after subsequent training under his direction, Jenkin was heard to bemoan the fact that since he had been studying "this confounded thing," he found a great deal of Scott's work both careless and clumsy,

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whereas formerly he had thought him quite perfect. Stevenson himself relates the incident.

"He told me one day that literature was not a trade; that it was no craft; that the professed author was merely an amateur with a door-plate. 'Very well,' said I, 'the first time you get a proof, I will demonstrate that it is as much a trade as bricklaying, and that you do not know it.' By the very next post, a proof came. I opened it with fear; for he was indeed a formidable amateur; always wrote brightly, because he always thought trenchantly; and sometimes wrote brilliantly, as the worst of whistlers may sometimes stumble on a perfect intonation. But it was all for the best in the interests of his education; and I was able, over that proof, to give him a quarter of an hour, such as Fleeming loved both to give and to receive."¹

1. Fountainhead
 2. A Note on Writing
 3. Letter to E. A. J. Stevenson, 1883
 4. Letter to Edmund Wilson, 1881
1. Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin

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B. Aims of Art

Though Stevenson may not always offer ideas that are astoundingly profound, he usually is consistent, and when he says a thing once, he generally says it again so many times that one is nothing if not absolutely convinced that he really means it. According to his tenets, art should ultimately strive for two things--significance and charm--and he repeats the statement so often, under different circumstances, that one feels almost compelled to mark the words with capital letters.

"The business of art is to give life to abstractions and significance and charm to facts."¹

"The one excuse and breath of art is charm."²

"Real art, whether ideal or realistic, addresses precisely the same feeling, and seeks the same qualities--significance or charm."³

"We are apt to forget that art is a diversion and a decoration, that no triumph or effort is of value, nor anything worth reaching except charm."⁴

Without these two qualities, art is apt to be not much more than daubing, he says, but he does not stop long

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"For the mind of the reader, always bent to pick up clues, receives no impression of reality or life, rather of an airless, elaborate mechanism; and the book remains enthralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art."¹

As for charm, his use of the word is perhaps best explained by the following passage.

"And this is the particular crown and triumph of the artist--not to be true merely, but to be lovable; not simply to convince, but to enchant."²

Fashions come and go in art as they do in everything else, but in any age and under the domination of any fashion, "the great man produces beauty, terror, and mirth."³ He tries to open our eyes, if it may be, and if only for an instant,

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When Stevenson says that the great artist produces mirth, he does not use the word inadvisedly in the sense of humor or jokes. He means that the mental attitude of the artist, which is reflected in his work, should be one of gaiety and enthusiasm for life rather than one of despondency or boredom. He should feel and try to transmit "the incommunicable thrill of things." As Stevenson says, and this will perhaps best explain the sense in which he uses the word, "No art, it may be said, was ever perfect, and not many noble, that has not been mirthfully conceived."¹

Under no condition should art depress us; its true function is to give us joy, and to send us along our way with a lighter load.

"In my view, one dank, dispirited word is harmful, a crime of lese-humanite, a piece of acquired evil; every gay, every bright word or picture, like every pleasant

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C. Relation of air of music, is a piece of pleasure set afloat; the reader catches it, and, if he be healthy, goes on his way rejoicing; and it is the business of art so to send him, as often as possible."¹

"Useless insufferable violence to the feelings is unpardonable. Life is hard enough for poor mortals without having it definitely embittered for them by bad art."²

The Art of Fiction by Henry James was published in Lancet in 1884 and reprinted in Partial Portraits in 1888. The essay, a discussion of the novel, was evoked by a paper that Walter Besant had written; and, in turn, this article by James prompted Stevenson to write an essay in which he took the opportunity of disagreeing with some of James' views.

James makes the statement that the air of reality in a novel is its chief virtue, and that the novelist's aim of aim is to produce an illusion of life. In this respect, says he, the novelist "competes with life."

"Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life without rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention."²

That expression "to compete with life", which James uses, makes Stevenson rise up in arms. For, according to his

1. Letter to William Archer, 1885
2. Victor Hugo's Romances

1. Stevenson, A humble correspondence
2. James, The Art of Fiction

air of music, is a piece of pleasure set
aloft; the reader catches it, and, if he
be healthy, goes on his way rejoicing; and it
is the business of art so to send him, as
often as possible."

"Useless inalterable violence to
the feelings is ungratifying. Life is hard
enough for poor mortals without having it
definitely embittered for them by art."

I. Letter to William Archer, 1883
S. Victor Hugo's Romances

C. Relation of Art to Life

"A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it."¹

The Art of Fiction by Henry James was published in Longman's Magazine in 1884 and reprinted in Partial Portraits in 1888. The essay, a discussion of the novel, was evoked by a paper that Walter Besant had written; and, in turn, this article by James prompted Stevenson to write an essay in which he took the opportunity of disagreeing with some of James' views.

James makes the statement that the air of reality in a novel is its chief virtue, and that the novelist's aim of aims is to produce an illusion of life. In this respect, says he, the novelist "competes with life."

"Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life without rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention."²

That expression "to compete with life", which James uses, makes Stevenson rise up in arms. For, according to his

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theory, competing with life is just exactly what the novel, and therefore art, does not do. All art is nothing but "a substitute, a compromise and convention," although it must be noticed that Stevenson, unlike James, uses the words in a sense that is far from being derogatory.

"Painting, ruefully comparing sunshine and flake-white, gives up truth of colour, as it had already given up relief and movement; and instead of vying with nature, arranges a scheme of harmonious tints. Literature, above all in its most typical mood, the mood of narrative, similarly flees the direct challenge and pursues instead an independent and creative aim. So far as it imitates at all, it imitates not life but speech: not the facts of human destiny, but the emphasis and the suppressions with which the human actor tells of them. The real art that dealt with life directly was that of the first men who told their stories round the savage camp-fire."¹

Geometry talks learnedly and convincingly about circles, and yet, if pressed, the mathematician is forced to admit that a circle is a thing "never seen in nature." Art, like geometry, evades the direct blinding reality of nature, and instead keeps its eye fixed on a "figmentary abstraction." It is true to life, but it is not true in a literal sense. A novel is not an inclusive literal transcript of life; it is a reasoned significant simplification of some phase of life.

"The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and

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and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work."¹

The artist who would presume to compete with life would have to be skilled in all the arts, since life, in its immensity, comprises the methods and materials of all the arts. Granted this condition of unlimited skill in all directions, which is palpably impossible, a super-artist might succeed in representing life; but the result of his labors would be chaos, for life is chaotic, teeming with seemingly unrelated incidents and endless complications, appealing at once to all the senses of man. Life is episodic and bewildering to the onlooker; a work of art, on the other hand, is complete, rational, and significant. And the power of art is due to the fact that the artist does not vie with life. His one method is to half close his eyes against the confusion of reality. Life is his material, but his technique in dealing with it is to select from it only that which will further the significance of his design, and to omit unconditionally all that is irrelevant. He does not throw life at you in one lump; he rearranges and gives significance to some small portion of it.

It is natural and consistent for Stevenson, whose beliefs are entirely in opposition to the camera eye of realism, thus to draw a sharp distinction between art and life.

1. A Humble Remonstrance

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Life is life, and art is art; and though art is bound by life at every turn, it yet stands apart, a thing of artifice rendered significant by its intelligent subterfuges. It "inheres" in nature, but it does not "represent" it.

"Music is but an arbitrary trifling with a few of life's majestic chords; painting is but a shadow of its pageantry of light and colour; literature does but drily indicate that wealth of incident, of moral obligation, of virtue, vice, action, rapture and agony, with which it teems. 'To 'compete with life', whose sun we cannot look upon, whose passions and diseases waste and slay us--to compete with the flavour of wine, the beauty of the dawn, the scorching of fire, the bitterness of death and separation--here is, indeed a projected escalade of heaven; here are, indeed, labours for a Hercules in a dress coat, armed with a pen and a dictionary to depict the passions, armed with a tube of superior flake-white to paint the portrait of the insufferable sun."¹

assert that he entirely rejects morality as a factor in art. But art is broad, and its general influence comprises much more than a rigid conscientious finger pointing the way to right and wrong.

"But of works of art little can be said; their influence is profound and silent, like the influence of nature; they mould by contact, we drink them up like water, and are bettered, yet know not how."²

Moreover, those artists from whose works we derive the greatest influence for good are definitely not those who set themselves up as moralists endowed with the mission of

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2. Stevenson, Walt Whitman

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D. Morality in Art

"No, sir," he replied, showing me a translation of the Sorrows of Werther, "That is a novel I picked up some time ago. It has afforded me great pleasure, though immoral."

"O, immoral!" cried I, indignant as usual at any implication of art and ethics."¹

Stevenson puts these words into the mouth of one of his characters in The Wrecker, but in this instance it is really Stevenson himself who is speaking since the words coincide exactly with his theories. His father, Thomas Stevenson, was fanatical in the belief that art should have a conscious moral aim, but R. L. S. refutes the heresy. A short clause, and a dependent one at that, which he uses somewhere, "If art had none but a direct moral influence,"² makes it impossible to assert that he entirely rejects morality as a factor in art. But art is broad, and its general influence comprises much more than a rigid conscientious finger pointing the way to right and wrong.

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teaching mankind how to live. Granted a sane outlook on life and a well-balanced mental attitude, the best teachers are just those who do not profess to teach at all.

"Every one has been influenced by Wordsworth, and it is hard to tell precisely how. A certain innocence, a rugged austerity of joy, a sight of the stars, something of the cold thrill of dawn, cling to his work and give it a particular address to what is best in us. I do not know that you learn a lesson; you need not--Mill did not--agree with any one of his beliefs; and yet the spell is cast. Such are the best teachers.....A spirit communicated is a perpetual possession. These best teachers climb beyond teaching to the plane of art; it is themselves, and what is best in themselves, that they communicate."1

It can be said that Stevenson is a moralist in the sense that we are all moralists, in the sense that the question of conduct, that of our neighbors and our own, is one of our chief topics of conversation and thought; but obviously he is not a moralist in art. Although his Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was taken as a text in the pulpit, Stevenson in thus representing man's dual nature was much more interested artistically, one could almost say exclusively interested, in showing the aftermaths of license and passion unleashed than in trying to convince man that he should be virtuous since evil leads to such dire results. Art has a moral influence, but that morality which he recognizes is broad, genial, and sunny. And that spirit of what he calls "puritan morality," which

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raises its hands in horror at the slightest suspicion of a provocation, makes him raise his hands even higher in yet greater horror.

"There is no quite good book without a good morality; but the world is wide, and so are morals. Out of two people who have dipped into Sir Richard Burton's Thousand and One Nights, one shall have been offended by the animal details; another to whom these were harmless, perhaps even pleasing, shall yet have been shocked in his turn by the rascality and cruelty of all the characters. Of two readers, again, one shall have been pained by the morality of a religious memoir, one by that of the Vicomte de Bragelonne. And the point is that neither need be wrong. We shall always shock each other both in life and art; we cannot get the sun into our pictures, nor the abstract right (if there be such a thing) into our books; enough if, in the one, there glimmer some hint of the great light that blinds us from heaven; enough, if, in the other, there shine, even upon foul details, a spirit of magnanimity."¹

It must be admitted that Stevenson had good reasons for railing against this "puritan morality" after his disheartening arguments over The Beach of Falesa with the editors and publishers who stupidly objected to the terms of the fraudulent marriage contract which is the pivot of the whole story.

"The plaintive request sent to me, to make the young folks married properly before 'that night' I refused; you will see what would be left of the yarn, had I consented. This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world; I usually get out of it by not having any women in it at all;

1. A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's

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but when I remember I had the Treasure of Franchard refused as unfit for a family magazine, I feel despair weigh upon my wrists!"¹

"Five more chapters of David..... All love affair; seems pretty good to me. Will it do for the young person? I don't know; since The Beach of Falesa, I know nothing except that men are fools and hypocrites, and I know less of them than I was fond enough to fancy."²

Stevenson is not so broad minded, however, and reminds one of Ruskin though he is mild in comparison, in the tie-up which he makes between an artist's private virtues and his work. There is a definite ratio between the two, and the better a man is, the better his work will be. He has never stated the idea formally, but it crops out now and again in his letters.

"The sum of virtues in our books is in relation of equality to the sum of virtues in ourselves."³

"Do you remember once consulting me in Paris whether you had not better sacrifice honesty to art; and how, after much confabulation, we agreed that your art would suffer if you did? We decided better than we knew. In this strange welter where we live, all hangs together by a million filaments; and to do reasonably well by others, is the first prerequisite of art. Art is a virtue; and if I were the man I should be, my art would rise in the proportion of my life."⁴

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 3. Letter to T. Watts-Dunton, 1886
 4. Letter to W. H. Low, 1883

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1. Valima Letters
2. Valima Letters
3. Letter to T. Watts-Dunton, 1886
4. Letter to W. H. Low, 1888

E. Realism and Idealism

"I want you to help me to get people to understand that realism is a method, and only methodic in its consequences; when the realist is an artist, that is, and supposing the idealist with whom you compare him to be anything but a farceur and a dilettante. The two schools of working do, and should, lead to the choice of different subjects. But that is a consequence, not a cause."¹

"Have you observed that the famous problem of realism and idealism is one purely of detail?"²

"All representative art, which can be said to live, is both realistic and ideal; and the realism about which we quarrel is a matter purely of externals."³

"Real art, whether ideal or realistic, addresses precisely the same feeling, and seeks the same qualities--significance or charm. And the same--very same--inspiration is only methodically differentiated according as the artist is an arrant idealist or an arrant realist. Each by his own method, seeks to save and perpetuate the same significance or charm; the one by suppressing, the other by forcing, detail. All other idealism is the brown foreground over again, like cup and ball. All other realism is not art at all--but not at all. It is, then, an insincere and showy handicraft."⁴

Stevenson's ideas on realism and idealism in art, then, boil down to this. Representative art, which can be called art, is neither entirely realistic nor entirely idealistic, but is a happy combination of the two. Any subject can be

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 2. Letter to C. W. Stoddard, 1886
 3. A Note on Realism
 4. Ibid.

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dealt with in a realistic or idealistic manner, and though the realist tends to select certain subjects, it does not follow that those subjects could not be treated idealistically with as much effect. Realism, which is nothing more than a whim of fashion, has no greater bonds, or closer affinity, with truth than has idealism. Truth in the portrayal of human nature and the conditions of life is in no way affected by the method employed to present it. And since the question of realism is merely one of method, the idealist, who is a capable artist, has as great a chance of being veracious as the realist has; so that there is nothing to choose between the two methods when they are practised with intelligent restraint. The realist and the idealist are working toward the same objective, the only difference being that they take different routes to reach their destination. And this difference in route, or method, consists in the number of details used, and the manner in which they are used. The realist, enamored with details for their own sake, piles one on top of another with an utter lack of restraint, and tries to make them all striking to the eye; the idealist, his attention fixed on the greater outlines of his objective, tends to use fewer details, and is content to use those of a conventional order. Hence, realism is simply a question of method, and that method one comprising a multiplicity of detail. Clayton Hamilton,

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by the way, in his Materials and Methods of Fiction, expresses much the same idea as Stevenson's when he says that the realist follows the inductive method of presentment while the idealist follows the deductive method.

Stevenson does not divide artists into fixed, or permanent, realists and never-die idealists. He thinks that those artists who once choose one method and then use it with no changes throughout the rest of their careers are nothing short of indolent and insincere. For real artists, every fresh work attempted is a challenge to their powers, and they will vary their technique with every new attempt. Speaking of such artists, he says,

"They cannot rest content with a process which, as they continue to employ it, must infallibly degenerate towards the academic and the cut-and-dried. Every fresh work in which they embark is the signal for a fresh engagement of the whole forces of their mind; and the changing views which accompany the growth of their experience are marked by still more sweeping alterations in the manner of their art."¹

Since Stevenson is opposed to a multiplicity of detail, and since realism, to him, entails innumerable detail, it is obvious that his sympathies do not lean in that direction. Whatever method is used, however, he says that there is one thing which the artist should do continuously and unsparingly--

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he should omit much and suppress more. Whether a realist or an idealist, the artist "must omit what is tedious or irrelevant, and suppress what is tedious and necessary."¹ In the very highest order of creative art, he says, every fact, every detail, admitted is important in its own right, clarifying or rendering more vivid, and it also contributes to the advancement of the general design.

"Nothing would find room in such a picture that did not serve, at once, to complete the composition, to accentuate the scheme of colour, to distinguish the planes of distance, and to strike the note of the selected sentiment; nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, build up the characters, expedite the progress of the fable, and strike home the moral or the philosophical design."²

He realizes that this ideal of art is manifestly unattainable in actual execution in most cases, and that the artist is often forced to include many facts and details in the story or the canvas which have no other purpose than to serve as padding. He admits this, but at the same time he insists that these details considerably weaken a work of art.

"Thus any work of art, as it proceeds towards completion, too often--I had almost written always--loses in force and poignancy of main design. Our little air is swamped and dwarfed among hardly relevant orchestration; our little passionate story drowns in a deep sea of descriptive eloquence or slipshod talk."³

1. A Note on Realism

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

he should omit much and suppress more. Whether a realist or an idealist, the artist "must omit what is tedious or irrelevant, and suppress what is tedious and necessary."¹ In the very highest order of creative art, he says, every foot, every detail, admitted is important in its own right, clarifying or rendering more vivid, and it also contributes to the advancement of the general design.

"Nothing would find room in such a picture that did not serve, at once, to complete the composition, to accentuate the scheme of colour, to distinguish the planes of distance, and to strike the note of the selected sentiment; nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, build up the characters, expedite the progress of the tale, and strike home the moral or the philosophical design."²

He realizes that this ideal of art is manifestly unattainable in actual execution in most cases, and that the artist is often forced to include many facts and details in the story or the canvas which have no other purpose than to serve as padding. He admits this, but at the same time he insists that these details considerably weaken a work of art.

"Thus any work of art, as it proceeds towards completion, too often--I had almost written always--loses in force and poignancy of main design. Our little art is swamped and dwarfed among hardly relevant orchestration; our little passionate story drowns in a deep sea of descriptive eloquence or slipshod talk."³

1. A Note on Realism
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century, Stevenson thinks, is much more apt to put too much emphasis on realism than to overstress the ideal. And with this idea in mind, he warns his fellow artists to beware of the least appearance of irrelevant dexterity, and he reminds them that it is very easy to fall

"into the error of the French naturalists, and consider any fact as welcome to admission if it be the ground of brilliant handiwork; or, again, into the error of the modern landscape-painter, who is apt to think that difficulty overcome and science well displayed can take the place of what is, after all, the one excuse and breath or art--charm. A little further, and he will regard charm in the light of an unworthy sacrifice to prettiness, and the omission of a tedious passage as an infidelity to art."¹

1. A Note on Realism *The Red and the White*

The Department of the Interior, Bureau of
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grant a lease to the National Park Service
for the use of the land in the
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F. Art as a Career

1. Necessary Qualifications for such a Career

"Art is art," he repeated sadly.
"It is not water-colour sketches, nor practising on a piano. It is a life to be lived!"¹

A man does not stumble on a career of art by accident. Fate, the play of circumstances, which may force him to sell shoes, can never force him to create. The artist stands apart from other men in that he is born with an almost overpowering desire to express his personality, ideas, emotions, and impressions through some medium or other. In other words, he has a definite vocation for art; and though he may be poor in execution, he may yet have a real vocation for all that. The inferior artist has a real mission in life; it is simply that he is incapable of carrying it out.

Stevenson warns young people who are thinking of embarking on a career of art to stop and to think long and seriously before they take the decisive step. It may be that they are merely experiencing a temptation for such a career, since, needless to say, the temptations are as common as the real vocations are rare. The youth, motivated by no special urge to create, who finds the prospect of an artistic career alluring because he thinks that it will give him unlimited

1. Stevenson, Providence and the Guitar

I. Necessary Qualifications for such a Career

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urge to create, who finds the prospect of an artistic career
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opportunities of tasting and recording experience is merely being tempted. The chances are that he dislikes all cut-and-dried occupations and is seeking a pleasant escape. Since there is no such thing as a negative vocation, and since the practice of an art is hard enough at best for those with real vocations, Stevenson does not hesitate to advise the young man in question to give up all thoughts of art as a life work.

According to Stevenson, there are two sorts of vocations: the imperfect vocation, and the real thing. An imperfect vocation is one which is general. A man may be vitally interested in the fundamentals of all creative work and yet not feel particularly drawn by any one art. Such a man passes impartially from one art to another as the spirit moves him. And Stevenson's advice to him, characteristically enough, is to concentrate on literature. He thinks that this type of artist eventually turns to criticism, and that practice in the field of literature is money in the bank for a rainy day since it teaches him how to write.

A man with a real vocation may have a general liking for all the arts, and Stevenson thinks that this is often the case, as it is; but the one infallible sign which segregates the artist with a real vocation is the positive, decisive, definite preference for one art. All arts interest him; only one has the power to enthrall him.

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"The mark of the real artist's calling is this laborious partiality for one art, this inextinguishable zest in its technical successes, and (perhaps above all) a certain candor of mind, to take his very trifling enterprise with a gravity that would befit the cares of empire, and to think the smallest improvement worth accomplishing at any expense of time and industry. The book, the statue, the sonata, must be gone upon with the unreasoning good faith and the unflagging spirit of children at their play."¹

The perplexed young man who wonders whether he has the "calling" can make sure by looking back over the period of his youth. If he has a liking for any one art which has a little more than held its own among the innumerable interests of youth, his question is answered in the affirmative. But there is even more to it than that. He must love the actual labor of his art to such a degree that it will never occur to him to question whether what he is doing is worth the effort. He must be willing to make sacrifices, and he should realize at the onset just what those sacrifices will entail. In the first place, he must not expect a large income, for the simple reason that he won't get one. As a result, he must make up his mind to be frugal, for frugality is one of the most important requirements in the artist. Without that saving quality, he may at times be tempted to pass off a mediocre slovenly piece of work, a cardinal sin in Stevenson's estimation. Moreover, the artist works wholly upon his honor. Knowing that

1. Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art.

"The mark of the real artist's calling is this: he is not satisfied with the technical, the mechanical, the material success, and (perhaps above all) a certain order of mind, to take his very trifling enterprises with a gravity that would belittle the cause of empire, and to think the smallest improvement worth accomplishing at any expense of time and industry. The book, the statue, the house, must be done upon with the unrelenting good faith and the unflinching spirit of children at their play."

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the public will quickly applaud "merits of design, the merit of first-hand energy, the merit of a certain cheap accomplishment which a man of the artistic temper easily acquires,"¹ the worthy artist does not stop his efforts there to bask in the dubious glory of effortless achievement; taskmaster, and sole judge of his powers, if he is true to his ideal of perfection, he toils ceaselessly in quest of "those more exquisite refinements of proficiency and finish,"² which lie far beyond the mental powers of the masses to recognize and to appreciate. In an appalling majority of cases, these are "lost pains," and the artist clearly realizes that they may be; yet he must school himself to remain constant to his own ideal of perfection, warding off laziness as if it were a disease. And it is this constancy to an ideal which gives dignity to the artist's life.

"It is this which makes his life noble; it is by this that the practice of his craft strengthens and matures his character."³

Thus Stevenson asserts that the practice of an art affords admirable training for the character even though he admits rather ruefully that there are occupations which are more manly than that of the artist. Curiously enough, he thinks that to be even remotely connected with art has an ennobling effect. Speaking of a second-rate violinist he says,

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 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.

The public will quickly apply "merits of design, the merit of first-hand energy, the merit of a certain cheap accomplishment which a man of the artistic temper easily acquires," the worthy artist does not stop his efforts there to seek in the dubious glory of effortless achievement; taskmaster, and sole judge of his powers, if he is true to his ideal of perfection, he fails ceaselessly in quest of "those more exquisite refinements of proficiency and finish," which lie far beyond the mental powers of the masses to recognize and to appreciate. In an appalling majority of cases, these are "literary," and the artist closely realizes that they may be; yet he must school himself to remain constant to his own ideal of perfection, working off laziness as if it were a disease. And it is this constancy to an ideal which gives dignity to the artist's life.

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2. Ibid.
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"His face looked more finished; more of the spirit looked out through it; it had a living, expressive air, and you could see that his eyes took things in. To be even one of the outskirters of art leaves a fine stamp on a man's countenance."¹

Speaking of the wages of art, Stevenson says, "The direct returns--the wages of the trade--are small, but the indirect--the wages of life--are incalculably great. No other business offers a man his daily bread upon such joyful terms."² Here again we run into the "art is a pleasure" motif. Since the practice of an art is a pleasure in itself, Stevenson thinks that that fact more than compensates for the small wages received; and, far from commiserating with those artists who complain of low monetary returns for their endeavors, he marvels at the fact that, living by a pleasure, they should be paid at all. This is all very well, but in my opinion, Stevenson dismisses the question of money with somewhat too airy, though graceful, a gesture. This utter disregard for money which he urges on the would-be artist fits in very well with the idealized portrait of the artist which he holds up before our eyes, but it is asking too much of any man. And, perhaps prompted by pettiness, one cannot help remembering that Stevenson, the artist, always had his father and his substantial means behind him when Stevenson, the man, was hard pressed for money. It must be admitted that oftentimes he was too proud to ask for help, but at least he had the comforting knowledge and feeling

1. An Inland Voyage

"His face looked more finished; more of the spirit looked out through it; it had a living, expressive air, and you could see that his eyes took things in. To be even one of the outskirters of art leaves a line stamp on a man's countenance."

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of security that help was there when he needed it.

He also dismisses fame with a high hand when he says, "I know a little about fame now; it is no good compared to a yacht."¹ Popularity, he tells the incipient artist, is an "empty and ugly thing," unstable, as changeable as the wind, and the only praise of value is that of his fellow artists, which is "one of the most enduring pleasures of the career of art."² Fame is no good compared to a yacht and he wants none of it, he says with righteous determination; but it is satisfying to discover that even he is no more than human when we find him writing rather wistfully a few years later,

"I wonder exceedingly if I have done anything at all good; and who can tell me? and why should I wish to know. In so little a while, I, and the English language, and the bones of my descendants, will have ceased to be a memory! And yet--and yet--one would like to leave an image for a few years upon men's minds--for fun."³

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1. Letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, 1887
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2. Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace a Career of Art
3. Various Letters

2. The Value of Aspiration in the Artist

"An aspiration is a joy forever, a possession as solid as a landed estate, a fortune which we can never exhaust and which gives us year by year a revenue of pleasurable activity.....Life is a very dull and ill-directed theatre unless we have some interests in the piece; and to those who have neither art nor science, the world is a mere arrangement of colours, or a foot-way where they may very well break their shins."¹

An aspiration in art, as in any other field, is a priceless possession in that it makes the artist view the world through the sharp eyes of curiosity and desire. It keeps him alert and intensely interested in the things around him. He may realize that his hopes are set on "inaccessible El Dorado," but the realization never really penetrates to his sense of acute consciousness; and he strives and labors and learns with an enthusiasm as ardent as if he knew for a certainty that he was on the last lap of his course of desired achievement. Whether he comes anywhere near attaining his desires or misses them completely is of no particular import. As a matter of fact, the chances are that nobody will ever reach his own secret El Dorado, for the goal set by aspiration seems to recede in almost direct proportion to one's advancement, and in the artist's case, his ideal of perfection is always far beyond his actual talent. And that is the worth of any aspiration; it keeps one striving hopefully, even though it keeps

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one in a state of dissatisfaction with actual achievement.

"Of making books there is no end," complained the Preacher; and did not perceive how highly he was praising letters as an occupation. There is no end, indeed, to making books or experiments, or to travel, or to gathering wealth. Problem gives rise to problem. We may study forever, and we are never as learned as we would. We have never made a statue worthy of our dreams."¹

Again, aspiration in art is the House Beautiful on the mountain top, which the artist sees in his dreams and which he tries to reach all his life with a determination more unswerving than that of Christian trying to find his way to the Eternal City. He never quite reaches it, of course, but it is always present in his dreams, forever spurring him on to fresh effort.

"So in youth, like Moses from the mountain, we have sights of that House Beautiful of art which we shall never enter. They are dreams and unsubstantial; visions of style that repose upon no base of human meaning; the last heart-throbs of that excited amateur who has to die in all of us before the artist can be born. But they come to us in such a rainbow of glory that all subsequent achievement appears dull and earthy in comparison. We were all artists; almost all in the age of illusion, cultivating an imaginary genius, and walking in the strains of some deceiving Ariel; small wonder, indeed, if we were happy! But art, of whatever nature, is a kind mistress, and though these dreams of youth fall by their own baselessness, others succeed, graver and more substantial; the symptoms change, the amiable malady endures, and still, at an equal distance, the House Beautiful shines upon its hill-top."²

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1. El Dorado
 2. Fontainebleau

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At the age of thirty-three, near the "Middle Ages," Stevenson has felt the heavy hand of disillusionment. He realizes, and perhaps exaggerates, his limitations; but notice that the "amiable malady" still endures, and that the House Beautiful, though more inaccessible than ever, is still as beautiful and worth attaining as ever it was.

"Yet I now draw near to the Middle Ages; nearly three years ago, that fatal Thirty struck; and yet the great work is not yet done--not yet even conceived. But so, as one goes on, the wood seems to thicken, the foot-path to narrow, and the House Beautiful on the hill's summit to draw further and further away. We learn, indeed, to use our means; but only to learn, along with it, the paralysing knowledge that these means are only applicable to two or three poor commonplace motives. Eight years ago, if I could have slung ink as I can now, I should have thought myself well on the road after Shakespeare; and now--I find I have only got a pair of walking-shoes and not yet begun to travel. And art is still away there on the mountain summit. But I need not continue; for, of course, this is your story just as much as it is mine; and, strange to think, it was Shakespeare's too, and Beethoven's, and Phidias's. It is a blessed thing that, in this forest of art, we can pursue our woodlice and sparrows, and not catch them, with almost the same fervour of exhilaration as that with which Sophocles hunted and brought down the Mastodon."¹

The important thing to Stevenson, at least as a theory, is not so much to succeed as to keep on trying. As he says, "To be truly happy is a question of how we begin and not of how we end, of what we want, not of what we have."² He

1. Letter to W. H. Low, 1883
2. El Dorado

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himself never quite caught up with his dreams of perfection, yet he never stopped trying to work his way to them, and he never opened his door to despair. And that is half the battle. As he says in the following passage, the point is to retain your zest even while you feel that you are failing.

"I meant when I was a young man to write a great poem; and now I am cobbling little prose articles and in excellent good spirits, I thank you. So, too, I meant to lead a life that should keep mounting from the first; and though I have been repeatedly down again below sea-level, and am scarce higher than when I started, I am as keen as ever for that enterprise. Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail in good spirits."¹

This exuberant, metaphorical outburst would sound more than a trifle ludicrous to any one who did not know very much about Stevenson. And if that "any one" happened to know just enough about him to be conscious of the fact that he preached against direct exaggeration in writing, there could be no doubt left in the reader's mind that in this particular instance Stevenson allowed himself to be carried away by his eloquence and "put on" generously. Surprisingly enough, the scratchy idler really means what he is saying. It must be

1. Reflections and Remarks on Human Life

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3. The Exclusive Artist

"I beg to inform you that I, Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Brashiana* and other works, am merely beginning to commence to prepare to make a first start at trying to understand my profession. O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art! and O that I am privileged to wade and shoulder through such oceans! Could one get out of sight of land--all in the blue? Alas not, being anchored here in flesh, and the bonds of logic being still about us. But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture! and how new each sight, squall, calm, or sunrise! An art is a fine fortune, a palace in a park, a band of music, health, and physical beauty; all but love--to any worthy practiser. I sleep upon my art for a pillow; I waken in my art; I am unready for death, because I hate to leave it. I love my wife, I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lost her; but while I can conceive my being widowed, I refuse the offering of life without my art. I am not but in my art; it is me; I am the body of it merely."¹

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"I beg to inform you that I, Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Bram Stoker* and other works, am merely beginning to commence to prepare to make a first start at trying to understand my profession. O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art! and O that I am privileged to wade and shoulder through such oceans! Could one get out of sight of land--all in the line? Alas not, being anchored here in flesh, and the bonds of logic being still about us. But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture! and how new each sight, aqual, calm, or sunrise! An art is a fine fortune, a palace in a park, a band of music, health, and physical beauty; all but love--to any worthy practitioner. I sleep upon my art for a pillow; I wake in my art; I am unready for death, because I hate to leave it. I love my wife, I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lose her; but while I can conceive my being widowed, I refuse the offering of life without my art. I am not but in my art; it is me; I am the body of it merely."

This exuberant, metaphorical outburst would sound more than a trifle insincere to any one who did not know very much about Stevenson. And if that "any one" happened to know just enough about him to be conscious of the fact that he preached against direct exaggeration in writing, there would be no doubt left in the reader's mind that in this particular instance Stevenson allowed himself to be carried away by his eloquence and "put on" generously. Surprisingly enough, the erstwhile idler really means what he is saying. It must be

admitted that the passage is sadly lacking in restraint, but for one who has followed Stevenson's career from beginning to end, who has some idea of the amount of time and the degree of energy which he spent in trying to make his work as technically perfect as it was in his power to make it, who is aware of his absorption in the technical matters pertaining to art, there is no doubt concerning the sincerity behind Stevenson's words. Art really is a fortune, health, and all the good things of life to him at the age of thirty-three, when he wrote the letter quoted above; and I have used this excerpt to serve as a contrasting background for some utterances concerning the exclusive artist which he made some eleven years or so later. These utterances are contradictory to all that has been said so far, and though not particularly important in themselves, because they are contradictory they need to be touched upon and perhaps explained, at least in so far as they can be explained.

"The implicit or exclusive artist is as low as many types of bourgeois."¹

"That was a home word of Pinkerton's deserving to be writ in letters of gold on the portico of every school of art; 'What I can't see is why you should want to do nothing else.'"²

"And then the problem that Pinkerton laid down: why the artist can do nothing else— is one that continually exercises myself. He

1. Stevenson and Osbourne, The Wrecker, p. 299
 2. Ibid

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for one who has followed Stevenson's career from beginning to
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"The intellect or exclusive article
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"And then the problem that Emerson
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cannot: granted. But Scott could. And Montaigne. And Julius Caesar. And many more. And why can't R. L. S.? Does it not amaze you? It does me. I think of the Renaissance fellows, and their all-round human sufficiency, and compare it with the ineffable smallness of the field in which we labour and in which we do so little. I think David Balfour a nice little book, and just the thing to occupy the leisure of a busy man; but for the top flower of a man's life it seems to me inadequate. Small is the word; it is a small age, and I am of it. I could have wished to be otherwise busy in this world. I ought to have been able to build lighthouses and write David Balfours too.....I take my own case as most handy, but it is illustrative of my quarrel with my age. We take all these pains, and we don't do as well as Michael Angelo or Leonardo, or even Fielding, who was an active magistrate, or Richardson, who was a busy bookseller. J'ai honte pour nous; my ears burn."¹

Obviously, he has grown to scorn the exclusive artist, but scorn on his part does not make sense. The fact is that any one as devoted to art as Stevenson thinks the artist should be, any one who should take as many pains in learning the technique of his art as Stevenson thinks the artist should take, any one who should execute as carefully as Stevenson advocates, would have neither the time nor the energy for any other sort of work. And this railing on Stevenson's part against himself and his paltry age is induced by temporary moods of depression when his muse refused to function and he naturally chafed under the restrictions imposed upon him by ill health and the demands

1. Letter to W. H. Low, 1894

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of his profession. As I have attempted to show, the House beautiful, although its contours had greatly changed and its tone had lost many of its most vivid colors, was as alluring to him when he died as it was when he caught his first breathtaking glimpse of it. Attacks of discouragement, when he felt that he had not accomplished very much after all, naturally became more and more frequent with increasing age, since age, unfortunately, raises standards of achievement instead of lowering them; but his later letters prove that at the time of his death he was just as intensely interested in all the technical problems of his trade, and just as much absorbed in the work he had done, was doing, and planned for the future as he ever was at any other period of his life. He was always vitally interested in life outside of books, he liked to travel, and he loved the sea; but, from beginning to end, literature was his first and only love. And the answer is that these expressions of scorn for the exclusive artist must be stricken off the record as unreliable testimony, being totally at variance with Stevenson's often expressed belief that art is a serious life-work, demanding unceasing toil in the quest of perfection and great strength of character on the part of the man who practises it.

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4. Notes for the Student of Any Art

"Keep an intelligent eye upon all the others. It is only by doing so that you come to see what Art is: Art is the end common to them all, it is none of the points by which they differ."¹

"In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meanwhile; get to love technical processes; to glory in technical successes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it entirely in terms of what you can do. Then when you have anything to say, the language will be apt and copious."²

"See the good in other people's work; it will never be yours. See the bad in your own, and don't cry about it; it will be there always. Try to use your faults; at any rate use your knowledge of them, and don't run your head against stone walls. Art is not like theology; nothing is forced. You have not to represent the world. You have to represent only what you can represent with pleasure and effect, and the only way to find out what that is is by technical exercise."³

Ever a willing teacher in all matters pertaining to art, Stevenson is particularly interested in the inexperienced young artist and tries to show him how to go about the business of becoming a full-fledged professional by the most direct and easiest route--though no way is easy. To accomplish this, his method is not to shroud art in veils of mystery; rather does he impatiently push the veils aside for the novice's

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 2. Ibid.
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1. Letter to Trevor Hadden, 1883
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benefit, and, in talking about art, he emphasizes the process of creation rather than the finished product. And since art is a craft, and as such its technique must be learned almost like the arithmetical table, he goes to some trouble to tell the young artist how to learn his lesson under the best conditions.

In the first place, the would-be artist must expect to put in a more or less protracted period of apprenticeship before going on to the process of actual creation, or representation. He must spend some time "snoozing," which, in Stevenson's surprising vocabulary, means to learn the rudiments of an art and the use of its tools almost stupidly, forgetting all else for the moment, as if these means were an end in themselves. And at this particular stage, they should be an end in themselves. Before the young writer, for instance, tries to introduce his thoughts to the world, he should have learned how to write so that these thoughts may be clothed in suitable garments. And so it is with all artists. Stevenson exempts no aspiring artist from regular attendance in kindergarten.

Not only must every apprentice-artist put in his seven years; Stevenson even tells him what sort of kindergarten he should attend. It is best for him to live among fellow artists, in an artists' colony if possible, such as Barbizon,

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"near that most smiling forest, Fontainebleau," where Stevenson himself spent so many happy and profitable months. In such a place, the young artist will be with his own kind, protected from those people who might try to spur on to the dangerous experiment of writing the great novel or painting the great picture before he is ready to do so. His companions will all be at that particular stage when technique is more important than content, and he will find in them an eager sympathy for his pitiable successes and countless failures. In short, he will be allowed to do his "snoozing" in peace.

A certain amount of "snoozing" is imperative in the artist's education, then, and it is partly to catch the disease that he should go to a colony like Barbizon; but the thing should not be carried too far. Sooner or later, for better or worse, having learned the use of his tools through practice, he must apply what he has learned and begin to use his tools for the purpose of representation. Some artists have not the ability to proceed beyond this stage of apprenticeship, while many who have the ability feel a certain reluctance to start and have the tendency to put it off from day to day. And after having taught these inveterate "snoozers" how to catch the disease, Stevenson obligingly gives a prescription for a cure.

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"Continual returns to the city, the society of men further advanced, the study of great works, a sense of humour or, if such a thing is to be had, a little religion or philosophy are the means of treatment."1

Any young artist can learn a great deal through direct contact with nature, says Stevenson, but the necessity of studying nature at first hand is more imperative in the painter's case than in that of the man of letters.

"But why? Because literature deals with men's business and passions which, in the game of life, we are irresistibly obliged to study; but painting deals with relations of light, and colour, and significances, and form, which from the immemorial habit of the race, we pass over with an unregardful eye."2

In the following passage, which addresses itself to the young painter in particular but which, in spirit, concerns all artists in general, Stevenson explains the lessons which nature can teach to the willing student; and, incidentally, he further explains what he means when he says that art should be "mirthfully conceived."

"Whether as man or artist, let the youth make haste to Fontainebleau, and once there let him address himself to the spirit of the place; he will learn more from sketching than from studies, although both are necessary; and if he can get into his heart the gaiety and inspiration of the woods he will have gone far to undo the evil of his sketches. A

1. Fontainebleau
2. Letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, 1883

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"Whether as man of letters, let the youth make haste to Fontainebleau, and once there let him address himself to the study of the place; he will learn more from sketching than from studies, although both are necessary, and if he can get into his heart the quiet and inspiration of the woods he will have gone far to undo the evil of his education."

spirit once well strung up to the concert-pitch of the primeval out-of-doors will hardly dare to finish a study and magniloquently ticket it a picture. The incommunicable thrill of things, that is the tuning-fork by which we test the flatness of our art. Here it is that Nature teaches and condemns, and still spurs us to further effort and new failure. Thus it is that she sets us blushing at our ignorant and tepid works; and the more we find of these inspiring shocks the less shall we be apt to love the literal in our productions. In all sciences and senses the letter kills; and to-day, when cackling human geese express their ignorant condemnation of all studio pictures, it is a lesson most useful to be learnt. Let the young painter go to Fontainebleau, and while he stupefies himself with studies that teach him the mechanical side of his trade, let him walk in the great air, and be a servant of mirth, and not pick and botanise, but wait upon the moods of nature. So will he learn--or learn not to forget--the poetry of life and earth, which, when he has acquired his track, will save him from joyless reproductions.....One thing, at least, is certain. Whatever he may choose to paint and in whatever manner, it is good for the artist to dwell among graceful shapes. Fontainebleau, if it be but quiet scenery, is classically graceful; and though the student may look for different qualities, this quality, silently present, will educate his hand and eye."¹

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II. General Theories Concerning Literature and the Writer

A. Definition of Literature

"Literature in many of its branches is no other than the shadow of good talk; but the imitation falls far short of the original in life, freedom, and effect. There are always two to a talk, giving and taking, comparing experience and according conclusions. Talk is fluid, tentative, continually 'in further search and progress;' while written words remain fixed, become idols even to the writer, found wooden dogmatisms, and preserve flies of obvious error in the amber of the truth. Last and chief, while literature, gagged with linsey-woolsey, can only deal with a fraction of the life of man, talk goes fancy free and may call a spade a spade. Talk has none of the freezing immunities of the pulpit. It cannot, even if it would, become merely aesthetic or merely classical like literature."

Obviously, all that has been said about art in general applies to literature in particular. Literature is a pleasure by the same token that art is one, and Stevenson has already proved to Fleeming Jenkin, and to us, presumably, that it is a craft. A man may be a born story-teller, for instance, but even a Shakespeare can produce striking situations only through artifice. As for making a pattern, literature, in that respect, is akin to music in that the two contrive their pattern of sounds in time.

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1. Talks and Talkers

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advantages which its sister arts do not have, but, for the same reason, it is hampered by limitations which are not present in the other arts. In that its material is the dialect of life, literature has a stronger and more direct appeal for the public than have the other arts, Stevenson thinks; but, on the other hand, words are stubborn tools to work with and are more difficult to manipulate than the plastic material of some of the other arts. In the first place, there are really not enough words in any language to cover the inexhaustible range of possible emotions and experiences, and, in the second place, words have become dully conventionalized in meaning and association through continuous usage.

"Language is but a poor bull's-eye wherewith to show off the vast cathedral of the world. There are not enough words in all Shakespeare to express the merest fraction of a man's experience in an hour.....As a matter of fact, we make a travesty of the simplest process of thought when we put it into words; for the words are all colored and forsworn, apply inaccurately, and bring with them, from former uses, ideas of praise and blame that have nothing to do with the question in hand."¹

Moreover, literature can make use of none of the means by which the other arts obtain relief and vigor, "but every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph must move in a logical progression, and convey a definite conventional import."²

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It is not surprising that Tusitala, the teller of tales,--the name given to Stevenson by the Samoans--should think that narrative is the most typical mood of literature. Speaking of Thoreau, he says,

"He was probably reminded by his delicate critical perception that the true business of literature is with narrative; in reasoned narrative, and there alone, art enjoys all its advantages, and suffers least from its defects."¹

"My theory is that literature must always be most at home in treating movement and change; hence I look for them."²

Stevenson does not doubt for a moment that literature has a great influence on us, and that it actually can be a formative factor in the development of character. Besides amusing us, literature instructs, whether directly or indirectly, and moves us to the unconscious emulation of goodness.

"The course of our education is answered best by those poems and romances where we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters. Few living friends have had upon me an influence so strong for good as Hamlet or Rosalind."³

"Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is D'Artagnan--the elderly D'Artagnan of the Vicomte de Bragelonne. I know not a more human soul, nor in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant

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 2. Letter to William Archer, 1885
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in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers."1

"What experience is more formative, what step of life is more efficient, than to know and weep for Colonel Newcome?"2

So that, at its best, the pattern of literature is one that pulsates with meaning for mankind.

"The Master of Ballantrae lacked all pleasurable, and hence was imperfect in essence."3

"Apropos, you are very right about my voluntary aversion from the painful sides of life. My childhood was in reality a very mixed experience, full of fever, nightmare, insomnia, painful days and interminable nights, and I can speak with less authority of gardens than of that other 'land of counterparts.' But to what end should we ransack these memories? The sufferings of life may be handled by the very greatest in their hours of insight; it is of its pleasures that our common poems should be stored; these are the experiences that we should seek to recall or to provoke; and I say with Thoreau, 'What right have I to complain, who have not ceased to wonder?' and, to add a rider of my own, who have no remedy to offer."4

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2. Some Gentlemen in Fiction

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Captain of the "Hawkeye".

"What experience is more formative,
what state of life is more efficient, than to
know and weep for Colonel Newcome?"

So that, at its best, the pattern of literature is

one that pulsates with meaning for mankind.

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1. Books Which Have Influenced Me
 2. Some Gentleman's Fiction

B. Aims of Literature

As he grew older, Stevenson leaned more and more firmly to the belief that literature should be cheerful, gay-spirited, and joy-giving.

"I re-read the other day that heart-breaking book, the life of Scott. One should read such works now and then, but O, not often. As I live I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave-spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place; the Waverley Novels are better to re-read than the over-true Life, fine as dear Sir Walter was."¹

"The Master of Ballantrae lacked all pleasurable-ness, and hence was imperfect in essence."²

"Apropos, you are very right about my voluntary aversion from the painful sides of life. My childhood was in reality a very mixed experience, full of fever, nightmare, insomnia, painful days and interminable nights; and I can speak with less authority of gardens than of that other 'land of counterpane.' But to what end should we renew these sorrows? The sufferings of life may be handled by the very greatest in their hours of insight; it is of its pleasures that our common poems should be formed; these are the experiences that we should seek to recall or to provoke: and I say with Thoreau, 'What right have I to complain, who have not ceased to wonder?' and, to add a rider of my own, who have no remedy to offer."³

Life at its best, he thinks, is so apt to be dismal that the author has no justification for contributing his pen-

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1. Letter to Mr. Dick, March, 1884
 2. Vailima Letters
 3. Letter to William Archer, 1885

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"I re-read the other day that heart-breaking book, the life of Scott. One should read such works now and then, but not often. As I live I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave-spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place; the Waverley Novels are better to re-read than the over-wise life, fine as dear Sir Walter was."

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1. Letter to Mr. Dick, March, 1884
2. Valima Letters
3. Letter to William Archer, 1885

ny's worth to the general gloom. It is unfortunate if the author is unhappy, but if he is, that is his private misfortune, and he has no right to inflict his depressing views on the unsuspecting reader. Hounded by sickness during most of his life except for the few years which he spent in Samoa, Stevenson sees no reason why this fact should affect his work. Far from introducing his woes to the public, he bends in the opposite direction by preaching a gospel of courage and joy; and Ordered South, a short essay, is the only one of his writings in which he ever took the invalid point of view or permitted his health troubles to color his work in any degree.

"And here we come to the division: not only do I believe that literature should give joy, but I see a universe, I suppose, eternally different from yours; a solemn, a terrible, but a very joyous and noble universe, where suffering is not at least wantonly inflicted, though it falls with dispassionate partiality, but where it may be and generally is nobly borne; where, above all (this I believe; probably you don't: I think he may, with cancer), any brave man may make out a life which shall be happy for himself, and, by so being, beneficent to those about him. And if he fails, why should I hear him weeping? I mean, if I fail, why should I weep? Why should you hear me?"¹

"To me the medicine bottles on my chimney and the blood on my handkerchief are accidents; they do not colour my views of life, as you would know, I think, if you had experience of sickness; they do not exist in my

1. Letter to William Archer, 1885

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 ence of sickness; they do not exist in my

prospect; I would as soon drag them under the eyes of my readers as I would mention a pimple I might chance to have.....What does it prove? what does it change? it has not hurt, it has not changed me in any essential part; and I should think myself a trifler and in bad taste if I introduced the world to these unimportant privacies."¹

Life can be ruthless and sad, but it can also be a gay adventure, and he thinks that it should be the author's concern to give his reader added zest and enthusiasm for the game. The critic, William Archer, who later became Stevenson's friend, had started their acquaintance by calling him a "rosy-gilled athletic-aesthete," by accusing him of insincerity, and by asserting that if he could prate about courage and joy it was for the simple reason that he knew nothing whatever of the sufferings in the world. Stevenson, a chronic invalid at the time, was amused and yet irritated by the absurdity of the accusation, and the following excerpt from one of his letters shows him attempting to justify his gospel of the brave-spirited.

"Are you aware that the praiser of this 'brave gymnasium' has not seen a canoe nor taken a long walk since '79? that he is rarely out of the house nowadays, and carries his arm in a sling?.....Can you conceive how profoundly I am irritated by the opposite affectation to my own, when I see strong men and rich men bleating about their

1. Letter to William Archer, 1885

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"Are you aware that the position
of this 'brave spiritism' has not been a
cause nor taken a long walk since 1897 that
he is rarely out of the house nowadays, and
carries his arm in a sling?.....Can you con-
ceive how profoundly I am irritated by the
opposite attention to my own, when I see
strong men and rich men boasting about their

C. The Gift of Reading

sorrows and the burthen of life, in a world full of 'cancerous paupers,' and poor sick children, and the fatally bereaved, ay, and down even to such happy creatures as myself, who has yet been obliged to strip himself, one after another, of all the pleasures that he had chosen except smoking, and who sees the circle of impotence closing very slowly but quite steadily around him?"¹

"I have really enjoyed this book as I—almost as I—used to enjoy books when I was going twenty—twenty-three, and these are the years for reading."²

In order to read with real profit at any age, however, a man must have been blessed with the gift of reading, a gift, surprisingly rare and generally unacknowledged, which "consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual independence—a free grace; I find I must call it—by which a man rises to understand that he is not punctually right, nor does truth when he differs absolutely wrong."³

The good reader, then, will be broad-minded and intelligent, since the two qualities go hand in hand. Literally, he will check his biases and get beyond the period of reading, giving the author an unobscured open field; though, of course, this does not mean that he will accept everything

1. Letter to William Archer, 1885

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one after another, of all the pleasures that
he had except smoking, and who sees the
circle of ignorance closing very slowly but
surely steadily around him?"

C. The Gift of Reading

"Whatever you do, read something else besides novels and newspapers; the first are good enough when they are good; the second, at their best, are worth nothing. Read great books of literature and history; try to understand the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages; be sure you do not understand when you dislike them; condemnation is non-comprehension. And if you know something of these two periods, you will know a little more about to-day."¹

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In order to read with real profit at any age, however, a man must have been blessed with the gift of reading, a gift, surprisingly rare and generally misunderstood, which "consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual endowment--a free grace, I find I must call it--by which a man rises to understand that he is not punctually right, nor those from whom he differs absolutely wrong."³

The good reader, then, will be broad-minded and intelligent, since the two qualities go hand in hand. Literally, he will check his biases and pet dogmas for the period of reading, giving the author an undisputed open field; though, of course, this does not mean that he will accept everything

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1. Letter to Ned Orr, 1891
 2. Letter to Henry James, 1891
 3. Stevenson, Books Which Have Influenced Me

"However you do, read something else besides novels and newspapers; the first are good enough when they are good; the second, at their best, are worth nothing. Read great books of literature and history; try to understand the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages; be sure you do not understand when you dislike them; comprehension is non-comprehension. And if you know something of these two periods, you will know a little more about to-day."

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In order to read with real profit at any age, however, a man must have been blessed with the gift of reading, a gift, surprisingly rare and generally misunderstood, which "consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual endowment--a free stock, I think I must call it--by which a man rises to understand that he is not fundamentally right, nor those from whom he differs absolutely wrong."

The good reader, then, will be broad-minded and intelligent, since the two qualities go hand in hand. Naturally, he will check his biases and put doubts for the period of reading, giving the author an undisturbed open field; though, of course, this does not mean that he will accept everything

1. Letter to Ned Cox, 1881
2. Letter to Henry James, 1881
3. Emerson, Books Which Have Influenced Me

as gospel truth merely because it is printed. He will read with an open mind, but after he has read a work to an end, his intelligence will enable him to sift the conclusive evidence from the inconclusive, and, on these grounds, to draw his own conclusions. He may disagree entirely with an author's views, but this difference in dogma, or creed, or sentiment will not render him totally incapable of appreciating that which is good in the author's works.

The infallible method of testing a reader is to confront him with "something that seems quite new, or that seems insolently false or very dangerous."¹ The reader's reaction is the answer, and that alone, without any other experiments, is enough to classify him among the black or white sheep. If he feels offended, and, for that very reason, thoughtlessly calls the author an unmitigated fool, he "flunks" the examination then and there, and do what he will, he will never be a reader.

"Either he cries out upon blasphemy and indecency, and crouches closer round that little idol of part-truths and part-conveniences which is the contemporary deity, or he is convinced by what is new, forgets what is old, and becomes truly blasphemous and indecent himself. New truth is only useful to supplement the old; rough truth is only wanted to expand, not to destroy, our civil and often elegant conventions."²

1. Books Which Have Influenced Me
 2. Ibid.

Such a reader is advised by Stevenson to limit his reading to fiction and the daily papers, since all good books, except fiction, he thinks, are only for those who have the gift of reading.

If, however, instead of exclaiming upon the author's stupidity, the reader holds his judgment, tries to understand the meaning of the passage, and attempts to discover whether any truths justify the author's attitude, he passes the test with flying colors. Such a man undeniably has the gift of reading, and there is nothing at all worth reading that he will read without some profit. Nothing can hurt a man who can thus stand upon his own feet and do his own thinking, and "gunpowder charges of the truth" will be much more apt to invigorate his creed than to weaken it.

Such a reader is advised by Stevenson to limit his reading to fiction and the daily papers, since all good books, except fiction, he thinks, are only for those who have the gift of reading.

It, however, instead of excluding upon the author's authority, the reader holds his judgment, tries to understand the meaning of the passage, and attempts to discover whether any truth is really the author's attitude, he passes the test with flying colors. Such a man necessarily has the gift of reading, and there is nothing at all worth reading that he will read without some profit. Nothing can hurt a man who can thus stand upon his own feet and on his own thinking, and "gunpowder charges of the truth" will be much more apt to invigorate his creed than to weaken it.

D. Realism

"Beware of realism; it is the devil; 'tis one of the means of art, and now they make it the end! And such is the farce of the age in which a man lives, that we all, even those of us who most detest it, sin by realism!"

Referring to his proclivity to preach upon all matters connected with the technical side of literature, Stevenson once said jokingly that if it were possible, he would certainly rise from his grave to preach. If it were possible, and he did, I imagine that part of his text would concern realism. At any rate, he carried on an enthusiastic one-man propaganda against realism, and tried valiantly to wean writers away from its practice.

It has been said before, though it may bear repetition since he himself places so much emphasis on the point, that realism, which is characterized by a multiplicity of detail, has to do with technique, and that it neither adds to, nor subtracts from, the fundamental truth lying behind a literary work.

"It is no especial cultus of nature and veracity, but a mere whim of veering fashion, that has made us turn our back upon the larger, more various, and more romantic art of yore. A photographic exactitude in dialogue is now the exclusive fashion; but even in the ablest hands it tells us no more--I think it even tells us less--than Moliere, wielding his

"Beware of realism; it is the devil;
'tis one of the names of art, and now they
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abstract hands it tells us no more--I think it
even tells us less--than folklore, withholding the

artificial medium, has told to us and to all time of Alceste or Orgon, Dorine or Chrysale. The historical novel is forgotten. Yet truth to the conditions of man's nature and the conditions of man's life, the truth of literary art, is free of the ages. It may be told us in a carpet comedy, in a novel of adventure, or a fairy tale. The scene may be pitched in London, on the sea-coast of Bohemia, or away on the mountains of Beulah."¹

The idealist can be as abstract as he desires and yet be none the less veracious, but his method entails its own pitfalls, which are at the opposite extreme from the dangers which surround the realist, but which are just as imminent.

"The immediate danger of the realist is to sacrifice the beauty and significance of the whole to local dexterity, or, in the insane pursuit of completion, to immolate his readers under facts; but he comes in the last resort, and as his energy declines, to discard all design, abjure all choice, and, with scientific thoroughness, steadily to communicate matter which is not worth learning. The danger of the idealist is, of course, to become null and lose all grip of fact, particularity, or passion."²

Stevenson thinks that the growth of detail, in the first stages of realism, indicated a keener awareness and greater comprehension of the conditions of life on the part of the author, but that, during his generation, this emphasis on detail has fallen into a merely decorative stage. The uncontrolled pursuit of detail for its own sake, when followed as a principle, he thinks, must inevitably lead to literary trickery.

1. A Note on Realism
 2. Ibid.

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Stevenson thinks that the growth of detail, in the three stages of realism, indicated a keener awareness and greater comprehension of the conditions of life on the part of the author, but that, during his generation, this emphasis on detail has fallen into a merely decorative stage. The uncontrolled pursuit of detail for its own sake, when followed as a principle, he thinks, must inevitably lead to literary trickery.

Balzac is a man "smothered under forcible-feeble detail, an inarticulate Shakespeare;"¹ Zola is a man of unquestionable force who wastes his talents on technical successes; and all extreme realists are "the odd suicide of one branch of the realists."²

Stevenson's plea to writers is to reduce details to a minimum in number, and a maximum in significance; and the lesson he so faithfully tries to teach is one of condensation, excision, and omission. "There is," he says, "but one art--to omit! O, if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an Iliad of a daily paper."³ All of which is all right, but one idly wonders why, moved by this passion for wholesale omission, he did not omit writing altogether.

"Continue to testify boldly against realism,"⁴ he implores one of his friends; and he himself in one of his essays, The Lantern Bearers, testifies boldly against it. These Lantern Bearers were boys--he was one of them--who would gleefully procure tin bull's eye lanterns at a certain season of the year. After nightfall, it was the custom for each one to steal out of his home into the dark night, with his lighted lantern, covered by a greatcoat, tied to a belt at his waist.

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1. Letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, 1883
 2. A Note on Realism
 3. Letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, 1883
 4. Letter to W. H. Low, 1883

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Lantern Bearer were boys--he was one of them--who would gladly
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the year. After midnight, it was the custom for each one to
steal out of his home into the dark night, with his lighted
lantern, covered by a greenest, tied to a belt at his waist.

1. Letter to E. A. M. Stevenson, 1883
2. A Note on Realism
3. Letter to E. A. M. Stevenson, 1883
4. Letter to W. H. Law, 1883

Cold and generally uncomfortable, these young asses, as he calls them, would promenade around in the dark and the rain; or else they would assemble in shivering groups to exchange foolish inanities about life. That they were uncomfortable or that they talked nonsense mattered not in the least to them; the blissful knowledge that their ill-smelling lanterns, hidden from the world, were swinging at their waists was enough to exhilarate them to such a degree that physical discomforts were no more than a trifle. Stevenson compares the realist to one who does not know the secret of the lanterns, and who therefore completely misinterprets the scene of the boys huddled in the rain. Supposing himself such a realist, attempting to describe such a scene, he says,

"Say that I came on some such business as that of my lantern-bearers on the links; and described the boys as very cold, spat upon by flurries of rain, and drearily surrounded, all of which they were; and their talk as silly and indecent, which it certainly was. I might upon these lines, and had I Zola's genius, render the lantern light with the touches of a master, and lay on the indecency with the ungrudging hand of love; and when all was done, what a triumph would my picture be of shallowness and dullness! how it would have missed the point! how it would have belied the boys! To the ear of the stenographer, the talk is merely silly and indecent; but ask the boys themselves, and they are discussing the possibilities of existence. To the eye of the observer they are wet and cold and drearily surrounded; but ask themselves, and they are in the heaven of a recondite pleasure, the ground of which is an ill-smelling lantern."¹

1. The Lantern Bearers

Gold and generally uncomfortable, these young asses, as he calls them, would promenade around in the dark and the rain; or else they would assemble in shivering groups to exchange foolish theories about life. That they were uncomfortable or that they talked nonsense mattered not in the least to them; the blissful knowledge that their ill-smelling lanterns, hidden from the world, were swinging at their waists was enough to exhilarate them to such a degree that physical discomforts were no more than a trifle. Stevenson compares the realist to one who does not know the secret of the lanterns, and who therefore completely misinterprets the scene of the boys' lullaby in the rain. Supposing himself such a realist, attempting to describe such a scene, he says:

"Say that I came on some such business as that of my lantern-bearers on the links; and described the boys as very cold, apart upon by flurries of rain, and generally surrounded, all of which they were; and their talk as silly and indecent, which is certainly true. I might upon these lines, and had I Zola's genius, render the lantern light with the touches of a master, and lay on the incandescence with the ungrudging hand of love; and when all was done, what a triumph would my picture be of shabbiness and dullness! how it would have belied the boys! To the ear of the average reader, the talk is merely silly and indecent; but see the boys themselves, and they are discussing the possibilities of existence. To the eye of the observer they are wet and cold and drowsily surrounded; but see themselves, and they are in the heaven of a beautiful pleasure, the ground of which is an ill-smelling lantern."

Thus the realist. He may achieve technical perfection, but he misses that tiny spark of poetry which endures in each man's heart. And his persistence in portraying life as dull, drab, and utterly devoid of joy is not only entirely at variance with Stevenson's conviction that literature should be gay-spirited rather than depressing, but is totally untrue to the reality of actual life. To emphasize his point further, Stevenson tells another story, a fable this time. It seems that a monk once went into the woods and paused for a moment to listen to a bird's song. Returning to his monastery in due time, he was amazed to find himself received like a stranger, and astounded to discover that he had been away for fifty years. This enchanter who makes the years seem like moments does not sing only in the woods and in fables, says Stevenson. The boys evoked his song with their lanterns; he is in everybody's life; and we spend the time that is our own in seeking for him. Our true life, for the enjoyment of which we consent to live, lies in the realms of fancy. In other words, we all have secret pleasures which make our life, seemingly miserable to the onlooker perhaps, a perpetual joy to ourselves. The realist fails to catch this poetry, and that is Stevenson's quarrel with him. In the realist's pages, he says,

"We find a picture of life in so far as it consists of mud and of old iron, cheap desires and cheap fears, that which we are ashamed to remember and that which we are careless whether we forget; but of the note of that time-devouring nightingale we hear no news."¹

I. The Lantern Bearers

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careless whether we forget; but of the note
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no news."

If the realist depicts a miser, he sees nothing but the meanness, sordidness, and filth that surround him. He does not realize that the mere fact that one is a miser indicates great powers of self-control and of self-renunciation, and he fails to hear the notes of the bird singing in the miser's ears, in terms of his recondite pleasure in saving his money or in counting it, which make his apparently sordid life a joy to himself. He looks at a man and sees nothing but the outward appearance, the exterior shell; and this is not at all the function of true realism, according to Stevenson.

"For to look at the man is but to court deception. We shall see the trunk from which he draws his nourishment; but he himself is above and abroad in the green dome of foliage, hummed through by winds and nested in by nightingales. And the true realism were that of the poets, to climb up after him like a squirrel, and catch some glimpse of the heaven for which he lives. And the true realism, always and everywhere, is that of the poets; to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action. That is the explanation, that the excuse. To one who has not the secret of the lanterns, the scene upon the links is meaningless. And hence the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books. Hence when we read the English realists, the incredulous wonder with which we observe the hero's constancy under the submerging tide of dullness, and how he endures the chatter of idiot girls, and stands by his whole unfeatured wilderness of an existence, instead of seeking relief in drink or foreign travel. Hence in the French, in that meat-market of middle-aged sensuality, the disgusted surprise with which we see the hero drift side-

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long, and practically quite untempted, into every description of misconduct and dishonour. In each, we miss the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennoble what is base; in each, life falls dead like dough, instead of soaring away like a balloon into the colours of the sunset; each is true, each inconceivable; for no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brain, with the painted windows and the storied walls"

On the whole, Stevenson thinks that the realists deal with unbelievably petty affairs, and the following passage gives a faint idea of how very tedious he finds their works. Incidentally, do not be misled by his reference to "these writers of romance." He is undoubtedly referring to the realists. He uses the word romance with malice aforethought, thinking that it will irritate them exceedingly, and taking great pleasure in the thought.

"The case of these writers of romance is most obscure. They have been boys and youths; they have lingered outside the window of the beloved, who was then most probably writing to some one else; they have sat before a sheet of paper, and felt themselves mere continents of congested poetry, not one line of which would flow; they have walked alone in the woods, they have walked in cities under the countless lamps; they have been to sea, they have hated, they have feared, they have longed to knife a man, and maybe done it; the wild taste of life has stung their palate. Or, if you deny them all the rest, one pleasure at least they have tasted to the full--their books are there to prove it--the keen pleasure of successful literary composition. And yet they fill the glob with volumes, whose cleverness inspires me with despairing admiration, and whose consistent falsity to all I care to

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"The case of these writers of romance is most obscure. They have been boys and youths; they have lingered outside the window of the beloved, who was then most gracefully writing to some one else; they have sat before a sheet of paper, and left themselves mere conglomerates of congested poetry, not one line of which would flow; they have walked alone in the woods, they have walked in circles under the countless lamps; they have been to sea, they have hated, they have loved, they have longed to kill a man, and maybe done it; the wild rhapsody of life has struck their palates. Or, if you deny them all the rest, one pleasure at least they have derived to the full--their books are there to prove it--the keen pleasure of successful literary composition. And yet they fill the glad volumes, whose clasp these inspired me with desperate admiration, and whose constant reply to all I care to

call existence, with despairing wrath. If I had no better hope than to continue to revolve among the dreary and petty businesses, and to be moved by the paltry hopes and fears with which they surround and animate their heroes, I declare I would die now. But there has never an hour of mine gone quite so dully yet; if it were spent waiting at a railway junction, I would have some scattering thoughts, I could count some grains of memory, compared to which the whole of one of these romances seems but dross."¹

Stevenson cannot bring himself to condone the unshakeable conviction, apparently held by all realists, that the average man is dull and almost insensible, and that to reach him on his own level they must write down to him. The average man is not dull at all, contends Stevenson; he is a man no different from the artist.

"and this harping on life's dulness and man's meanness is a loud profession of incompetence; it is one of two things: the cry of the blind eye, I cannot see, or the complaint of the dumb tongue, I cannot utter."²

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1. The Lantern Bearers
 2. Ibid.

call existence, with despairing wrath. If I had no better hope than to continue to revolve among the grassy and petty businesses, and to be covered by the petty hopes and tears with which they surround and animate their heroes, I declare I would die now. But there was never an hour of mine quite so dull yet; if it were spent waiting at a railway junction, I would have some scattering thoughts, I could count some points of memory, compared to which the whole of one of these romances seems but "dross."

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E. Romance

Stevenson thinks that the desire for romance, for fit and striking incident that captures the imagination and holds it in durance not at all vile, is an appetite of man as natural and as exacting as hunger, and that it is a factor which must be taken into consideration by any literature which is vital and lively. To illustrate this need of striking incident, and its importance, he compares the undying popularity of Robinson Crusoe with the discredit into which Clarissa Harlowe has fallen.

"Clarissa is a book of a far more startling import, worked out, on a great canvas, with inimitable courage and unflagging art. It contains wit, character, passion, plot, conversations full of spirit and insight, letters sparkling with unstrained humanity..... And yet a little story of a shipwrecked sailor, with not a tenth part of the style nor a thousandth part of the wisdom, exploring none of the arcana of humanity and deprived of the perennial interest of love, goes on from edition to edition, ever young, while Clarissa lies upon the shelves unread.....Yet Clarissa has every quality that can be shown in prose, one alone excepted--pictorial or picture-making romance. While Robinson depends, for the most part and with the overwhelming majority of its readers, on the charm of circumstance

In childhood, he says, we all read books for one quality, and one alone--the romantic. Grown up, we may have an appreciation of style, characterization, eloquence, or what you will, but we all still demand romantic adventure. In his opinion, we spend a great proportion of our time in day-dreaming;

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"Crane is a book of a far more startling import, worked out, on a great scale, with admirable courage and unflinching aim. It contains wit, character, passion, plot, conversations full of spirit and insight, letters sparkling with unvarnished humanity.... And yet a little story of a shipwrecked sailor, with not a touch of the style nor a thousandth part of the wisdom, exploring none of the aspects of humanity and deprived of the personal interest of love, goes on from edition to edition, ever young, while Crane lies upon the shelves unused.... Yet Crane has every quality that can be shown in prose, one alone excepted--the interest of picture-making romance. While Hobbes degenerates, for the most part and with the overwhelming majority of its readers, on the point of circumstance

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certain places, certain conditions, inspire us with the feeling that such and such a thing should happen in such surroundings, and we spend happy hours in pleasant contemplation of what might happen--preferably to us. As Stevenson says, we spend our time in "vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment."¹ All of us, even down to the most feeble in intellect, tell ourselves stories of one kind or another; and this is where the great creative writer comes in. He gives body to our day-dreams and substantiates them by clothing them in appropriate stories.

"His stories may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the day-dream. The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing should follow; and not only the characters talk aptly and think naturally, but all the circumstances in a tale should answer one to another like notes in music."²

"Drama is the poetry of conduct, romance the poetry of circumstance."³ By this Stevenson means that the serious theatre, built solely on moral considerations, must perforce deal with the conflicts, temptations, and vacillations of the conscience; while romance, on the other hand, busies itself with material, or adventure, which has no moral implication, or which, if it deals with the conscience at all, does so in normal,

1. A Gossip on Romance

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

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1. A Guest in Romance
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

healthy relations. It does not concern itself with the problem of whether it is right or wrong to do a certain thing; its interest lies wholly in how that certain thing is accomplished. "There is a vast deal in life and letters both which is not immoral, but simply a-moral," says Stevenson; and he contends that with such material as "the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms or the diplomacy of life,"¹ it is possible to create good tales. It is even possible, he thinks, though not the highest form of art--for "in the highest achievements of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law"²--to subordinate character and drama completely to romance. As an example of stories in which this has been done effectively, he cites the early chapters of the Count of Monte Cristo and Arabian Nights. Here is no intellectual or moral interest whatsoever is to be found; the characters are nothing more than puppets; romance, or adventure, reigns supreme, and it is more than enough to stimulate and to hold our interest.

True romantic art makes use of all things within the realm of literature. "It reaches into the highest abstraction

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 2. Ibid.

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True romantic art makes use of all things within the
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of the ideal; it does not refuse the most pedestrian realism."¹ Nor, curiously enough, does it depend for its charm upon incidents which are materially important in themselves. One can get a stirring, thrilling sense of adventure out of incidents which are really trifling.

In view of the fact that no art creates an illusion, Stevenson thinks that the story-teller achieves a real triumph when the reader, consciously assuming the hero's identity, takes part in the adventures in his own person; and it is only through the charm and fitness of the incidents that the narrator can accomplish this feat.

"It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only, do we say that we have been reading a romance. It is not only pleasurable things that we imagine in our day-dreams; there are lights in which we are willing to contemplate even the idea of our own death; ways in which it seems as if it would amuse us to be cheated, wounded, or calumniated. It is thus possible to construct a story, even of tragic import, in which every incident, detail and trick of circumstance shall be welcome to the reader's thoughts. Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the

1. A Gossip on Romance

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atmosphere and tenor of his life; and when the game so chimes with his fancy that he can join in it with all his heart, when it pleases him with every turn, when he loves to recall it and dwells upon its recollection with entire delight, fiction is called romance."¹

"Each, in particular, is the happy star of this trade of writing, that it should combine pleasure and profit to both parties, and be at once agreeable, like fiddling, and useful, like good preaching."²

"Any literary work which conveys faithful facts or pleasing impressions is a service to the public. It is even a service to be thankfully proud of having rendered. The slightest novels are a blessing to those in distress, not otherwise likely a greater."³

"Here, then, is work worth doing and worth trying to do well. And so, if I were minded to welcome any great accession to our trade, it should not be from any hope of a higher wage, but because it was a trade which was useful to a very great and in a very high degree, which every honest tradesman could make more serviceable to mankind in his single strength; which was difficult to do well and possible to do better every year; which called for scrupulous thought on the part of all who practiced it, and hence became a perpetual education to their regular customers; and which, say it as you please, in the large majority of the best cases will still be unpaid."⁴

According to Stevenson, there are only two good reasons for the choice of any occupation: innate taste in the chooser, and some high usefulness in the profession selected to justify its practice. And, judging from the quotations listed

1. Stevenson, The Morality of the Profession of Letters

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

1. A Gossip on Romance

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F. Writing as a Profession

"Literature, like any other art, is singularly interesting to the writer; and, in a degree peculiar to itself among the arts, it is useful to mankind."¹

"Such, in particular, is the happy star of this trade of writing, that it should combine pleasure and profit to both parties, and be at once agreeable, like fiddling, and useful, like good preaching."²

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 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
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"Literature, like any other art, is singularly interesting to the writer; and, in a degree peculiar to itself, among the arts, it is useful to mankind."

"Such, in particular, is the happy case of this trade of writing, that it should combine pleasure and profit to both parties, and be at once agreeable, like fishing, and useful, like good preaching."

"Any literary work which conveys faithful facts or pleasing impressions is a service to the public. It is even a service to be thankfully proud of having rendered. The slightest novels are a blessing to those in distress, not characters itself a greater."

"Here, then, is work worth doing and worth trying to do well. And so, if I were minded to welcome any great accession to our trade, it should not be from any reason of a higher wage, but because it was a trade which was useful in a very great and in a very high degree; which every honest tradesman could make more serviceable to mankind in his single strength; which was difficult to do well and possible to do better every year; which called for scrupulous thought on the part of all who practised it, and hence became a perpetual education to their nobler nature; and which, pay it as you please, in the large majority of the best cases will still be unpaid."

According to Stevenson, there are only two good reasons for the choice of any occupation: innate taste in the chooser, and some high usefulness in the profession selected to justify its practice. And, judging from the quotations listed

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

above, since even the author who has no other pretensions than to please or to amuse performs a real service, the profession of writing can be particularly beneficial to mankind. It can be useful to mankind to a great extent, but the point is that it can also do harm to as great an extent. It is all up to the individual author, to his awareness of the duties incumbent upon any man who writes, and his sense of honesty and responsibility in carrying them out.

All that has been said about the necessity of the artist's being frugal and honest applies, of course, to the author. But beyond that, he has other responsibilities which weigh much more heavily upon his shoulders than upon those of the other artists because his work has far reaching effects and he can influence many people in their mode of thinking. By the very act of writing, he automatically sets himself up as a leader of the minds of men. In his small way, whether aware of the fact or not, he contributes his share to that vast total called Public Opinion; and it is in his power to counteract, to some extent at least, the evil done by newspapers. Moreover, "the sum of the contemporary knowledge or ignorance of good and evil is, in large measure, the handiwork of those who write."¹ Thus, though the author, like all other artists, is striving

1. The Morality of the Profession of Letters

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ultimately for charm, or his own particular substitute for it, it is not to be attained at all costs. He has certain duties towards his readers, and he should make it a point of conscience to keep them ever present in his mind. And the man who considers the profession of letters merely on the basis of monetary returns, who writes with his eye fixed singly on his livelihood, debases a noble tradition, and is utterly without the pale.

"To treat all subjects in the highest, the most honourable, and the pluckiest spirit, consistent with the fact, is the first duty of a writer,"¹ says Stevenson; and he considers the view, or attitude, of the writer more important than his subject.

"Now this spirit in which a subject is regarded, important in all kinds of literary works, becomes all-important in works of fiction, meditation, or rhapsody; for there it not only colours but itself chooses the facts; not only modifies but shapes the work. And hence, over the far larger proportion of the field of literature, the health or disease of the writer's mind or momentary humour forms not only the leading feature of his work, but is, at bottom, the only thing he can communicate to others. In all works of art, widely speaking, it is first of all the author's attitude that is narrated, though in the attitude there be implied a whole experience and a theory of life."²

It would therefore be desirable that all literary work should issue from "sound, healthy, human, and potent

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work should issue from "sound, healthy, human, and potent

impulses." he says, although he realizes, on second thought, that this ideal condition is manifestly impossible. However, imperfect as man is, it is his business in literature to express himself as he is. If he does anything else, he will be untrue, and that is worse than to sin against morality. On the one hand, he must not sham a sentiment; on the others, he must not conceal one in which he really believes.

"To ape a sentiment, even a good one, is to travesty a sentiment; that will not be helpful. To conceal a sentiment, if you are sure that you hold it, is to take a liberty with truth."¹

This first duty of the writer, then, is moral; it is a matter to be settled between him and his conscience. It is evident that he can never expect to be absolutely right either in his conduct or in his work, but it is in his power to make as sure as possible that he is right. And to make sure of that, says Stevenson, there is only one hard and fast rule--to think long and seriously before writing.

"Nothing should be done in a hurry that can be done slowly. It is no use to write a book and put it by for nine or even ninety years; for in the writing you will have partly convinced yourself; the delay must precede any beginning; and if you meditate a work of art, you should first long roll the subject under the tongue to make sure you like the flavour, before you brew a volume that shall taste of it from end to end; or if you

impulse," he says, although he realizes, on second thought, that this ideal condition is manifestly impossible. However, important as man is, it is his business in literature to express himself as he is. If he goes anything else, he will be untrue, and that is worse than to sin against morality. On the one hand, he must not share a sentiment; on the other, he must not conceal one in which he really believes.

"To spy a sentiment, even a good one, is to betray a sentiment; that will not be helpful. To conceal a sentiment, if you are sure that you hold it, is to take a liberty with truth."

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"Nothing should be done in a hurry that can be done slowly. It is no use to write a book and put it by for nine or even ninety years; for in the writing you will have partly convinced yourself; the delay must precede any beginning; and if you meditate a work of art, you should first long roll the subject under the tongue to make sure you like the flavour, before you brew a volume that shall taste of its from end to end; or if you

propose to enter on the field of controversy, you should first have thought upon the question under all conditions, in health as well as in sickness, in sorrow as well as in joy. It is this nearness of examination necessary for any true and kind writing that makes the practice of the art a prolonged and noble education for the writer."¹

The second duty of the writer is truth to the fact. Because his works, even the most unimportant among them, are bound to be read by a certain number of people and will affect their thoughts and actions, however transiently, he must make sure that the facts which he communicates are answerable to the facts of life. The picture which he presents must not be distorted. It must be reasonably true to the facts of life, so that the reader will not be led to think the world a paradise or a hell, when it is neither, nor himself a beast or an angel, when he is but a human being with a human being's failings and qualities. And even if the writer imagines that the knowledge of a certain fact may discourage or corrupt a reader, he should realize that it is better not to withhold the fact, since it is in this world as it is, of good and evil, that the reader must live and win his spurs. "In one word, it must always be foul to tell what is false; and it can never be safe to suppress what is true."²

Moreover, if the author is dominated by some narrow faith, it stands to reason that he will be swayed unduly by

1. The Morality of the Profession of Letters
2. Ibid.

propose to enter on the field of controversy, you should first have thought upon the question under all conditions, in health as well as in sickness, in sorrow as well as in joy. It is this earnestness of examination necessary for any true and kind writing that makes the practice of the art a prolonged and noble education for the writer."¹

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prejudice; and prejudice and partiality are two things which should never find a voice through his pen. His to see that he keeps his mind "supple, charitable, and bright." And if there is anything which he does not understand, or understands but imperfectly, it behooves him to keep silent on the subject; for the writer's cardinal sin is to convey a wrong impression, and the guilt is but doubled if the wrong impression is conveyed with vividness and power.

These two quotations, taken at random, remind us again of the fact that, to Stevenson, writing is a craft whose fundamentals must be learned thoroughly before it can be practiced with any degree of success. Not even a genius, though his greater intelligence may enable him to grasp the fundamentals of the art of writing more quickly than another, can turn out an articulate, finished piece of work without having first juggled enough with words so that the right ones come immediately at his beck and call, and without having learned something about rhythm, harmony, and the construction of sentences.

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veyed with vividness and power.

G. Learning to Write

"The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish."¹

"People think that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions."²

These two quotations, taken at random, remind us again of the fact that, to Stevenson, writing is a craft whose fundamentals must be learned thoroughly before it can be practised with any degree of success. Not even a genius, though his greater intelligence may enable him to grasp the fundamentals of the art of writing more quickly than another, can turn out an articulate, finished piece of work without having first juggled enough with words so that the right ones come immediately at his beck and call, and without having learned something about rhythm, harmony, and the construction of sentences.

1. Truth of Intercourse

2. Letter to Henry James, 1884

"The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish."

"People think that striking sentences, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by printed suggestions."

These two quotations, taken at random, remind us again of the fact that, to Stevenson, writing is a craft whose fundamentals must be learned thoroughly before it can be practiced with any degree of success. Not even a genius, though his greater intelligence may enable him to grasp the fundamentals of the art of writing more quickly than another, can turn out an articulate, finished piece of work without having first juggled enough with words so that the right ones come immediately at his beck and call, and without having learned something about rhythm, harmony, and the construction of sentences.

1. Imitation

This is the first and the most important step in the education of the writer. His period of apprenticeship should comprise continual practice in the imitation of good models. That method, arduous, long, and discouraging as it may be, is the only way to learn to write, as Stevenson says in the account which he has left of his own protracted period of persistent "snoozing." The following passage, particularly the section referring humorously to his having played the sedulous ape to a host of authors, has often been quoted and as often misinterpreted, and it occupies so important a place in any study of Stevenson's literary theories that it seems advisable to include it, in spite of its length.

"All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use, it was written consciously for practice.....Description was the principal field of my exercise; for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory.

This is the first and the most important step in the education of the writer. His period of apprenticeship should comprise continual practice in the imitation of good models. That method, arduous, long, and discouraging as it may be, is the only way to learn to write, as Stevenson says in the account which he has left of his own protracted period of perseverant "snoozing." The following passage, particularly the section referring humorously to his having played the technician and to a host of authors, has often been quoted and as often misinterpreted, and it occupies so important a place in any study of Stevenson's literary theories that it seems advisable to include it, in spite of its length.

"All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the treasures of the scene or commemorate some halting sentence. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no other use, it was written consciously for pleasure.... Description was the principal field of my exercises; for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and towns and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory.

This was all excellent, no doubt; so were the diaries I sometimes tried to keep. And yet this was not the most efficient part of my training. Good though it was, it only taught me (so far as I have learned them at all) the lower and less intellectual elements of the art, the choice of the essential note and the right word: things that to a happier constitution had perhaps come by nature. And regarded as training, it had one grave defect; for it set me no standard of achievement. So that there was perhaps more profit, as there was certainly more effort, in my secret labours at home. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Brown, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks, which was called The Vanity of Morals: it was to have a second part, The Vanity of Knowledge; and as I had neither morality nor scholarship, the names were apt; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written no less than three times: first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne. So with my other works.....But enough has been said to show by what arts of impersonation, and in what purely ventriloquial efforts I first saw my words on paper.

That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was so Keats learned, and there was never a finer temperament for

literature than Keats's; it was so, if we could trace it out, that all men have learned; and that is why a revival of letters is always accompanied or heralded by a cast back to earlier and fresher models. Perhaps I hear some one cry out: But this is not the way to be original! It is not; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality. There can be none more original than Montaigne, neither could any be more unlike Cicero; yet no craftsman can fail to see how much the one must have tried in his time to imitate the other. Burns is the very type of a prime force in letters: he was of all men the most imitative. Shakespeare himself, the imperial, proceeds directly from a school. It is only from a school that we can expect to have good writers; it is almost invariably from a school that great writers, these lawless exceptions, issue. Nor is there anything here that should astonish the considerate. Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it."¹

This passage, as I have mentioned, has been misinterpreted by many critics who will not understand that when Stevenson advocates the imitation of good models, he advocates it merely as a means to a definite end. Because he dares to mention the word imitation with full approbation, they jump immediately to the conclusion that his own career was one of

1. A College Magazine

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imitation, that he never developed a style of his own but to the end poured out a potpourri of all the styles of the old masters whom he had studied, and that he advises all young writers to follow in his footsteps. However, since the subject will be discussed later, it is enough for our purpose now to know that, according to Stevenson, the only way to learn to write is by the imitation of good writers.

as the one just recounted was not exactly trying to avoid labor. is a matter of fact, so staggering to the onlooker is the amount of work which Stevenson managed to accomplish during his relatively short life that it is somehow irritating to hear him describe himself as an idler at any period of his life. "By all means," says this idler, in one instance, "begin your holiday even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be done in a week."

He believes in work, but he thinks that its effort is most salutary when there are definite periods of rest and relaxation between the periods of endeavor.

"It is my theory that work is highly beneficial, but that it should, if possible, be taken in batches, with a clear break and breathing space between. I always do vary my work, laying one thing aside to take up another, not merely because I believe it rests the

1. Mrs. Stevenson, Preface of St. Ives
2. See Trilby

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2. Theory of Work

"Not even influenza and a consequent hemorrhage could hold R. L. S. back from St. Ives. His amanuensis taught him the deaf and dumb alphabet by which he slowly and laboriously dictated fifteen pages."¹

It is obvious that any one who had the tenacity to put himself through a course of training as rigorous and wearisome as the one just recounted was not exactly trying to avoid labor. As a matter of fact, so staggering to the onlooker is the amount of work which Stevenson managed to accomplish during his relatively short life that it is somehow irritating to hear him describe himself as an idler at any period of his life. "By all means," says this idler, in one instance, "begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be done in a week."²

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brain, but because I have found it most beneficial to the result. Reading, Bacon says, makes a full man, but what makes me full of any subject is to banish it for a time from all my thoughts."¹

Stevenson carries the idea, that the author should vary his work, further by saying that work should be varied not only in actual subject, but also in degree of difficulty. He thinks that the author should periodically take stock of his qualities and powers, between intervals of doing the things he likes to do and knows that he can do, and that he should attempt to develop his talent by doing work which is much more difficult of accomplishment than any which he has done up to that time.

"I believe in the covering of much paper, each time with a definite and not too difficult artistic purpose; and then, from time to time, drawing oneself up and trying, in a superior effort, to combine the facilities thus acquired or improved. Thus one progresses."²

"I have worked very hard at it, and so do not expect any great public favour. In moments of effort, one learns to do the easy things that people like. There is the golden maxim; thus one should strain and then play, strain again and play again. The strain is for us, it educates; the play is for the reader, and pleases."³

The author should make this conscious effort at self-

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1. Letter to Mr. Dick, 1884
 2. Letter to Sidney Colvin, 1884
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"That is the hard part of literature. You aim high, and you take longer over your work, and it will not be so successful as if you had aimed low and rushed it. What the public likes is work (of any kind) a little loosely executed; so long as it is a little wordy, a little slack, a little dim and knotless, the dear public likes it; it should (if possible) be a little dull into the bargain. I know that good work sometimes hits; but, with my hand on my heart, I think it is by accident. And I know also that good work must succeed at last; but that is not the doing of the public; they are only shamed into silence or affectation."¹

This indifference on the part of the public is no excuse for the author, as it is no excuse for any other artist, to be false to his ideal of perfection, imperfect as it may be. And even if these extra pains are appreciated by no one except himself, his not to ask whether they are worth the trouble. In one instance, Stevenson voices this heretical question after saying that he has written a certain chapter of The Wrecker five times, and that his collaborator, Lloyd Osbourne, has written it three times. He asks the question, but he hastens to add,

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"Alas, that I should ask the question! Two classes of men--the artist and the educationalist are sworn, on soul and conscience, not to ask it. You get an ordinary, grinning, red-headed boy, and you have to educate him. Faith supports you; you give your valuable hours, the boy does not seem to profit, but that way your duty lies, for which you are paid, and you must persevere."¹

In a letter written three years before his death, Stevenson remarks that he used to write very slowly and that he writes more rapidly now, but, he says, "I still sit a long while silent on my eggs."

"Unconscious thought, there is the only method: macerate your subject, let it boil slow, then take the lid off and look in--and there your stuff is, good or bad. The essential part of work is not an act, it is a state."²

Even if the essential part of work is a state rather than an act, Stevenson often spent almost as much time in writing as he had spent in "macerating." "I have spent a living half-hour upon a single clause and have a gallery of variants that would surprise you,"³ he writes in 1892. In 1893, he announces that he has spent twenty-one days of hard work in writing twenty-four pages, "et encore sure to be re-written;" and his letters abound with similar references. These diffi-

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1. Letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, 1894
 2. Letter to W. Craibe Angus, 1891
 3. Vailima Letters

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1. Letter to E. A. M. Stevenson, 1894
2. Letter to W. Craik Angus, 1891
3. Various Letters

cult spells were the result of over-work and ill health, of course, but, even so, Stevenson toiled doggedly after he had once decided on the career of a writer; and there is no doubt that he thinks every author must do the same thing unless, like Scott, he is satisfied with a lower level of achievement than is actually within his powers. The following excerpts taken from Stevenson's letters show the role which he attributes to industry in the development of his talent. And the moral is that industry will do as much for any one, with some sort of talent as a starting point, of course, who has the desire to write.

At the age of twenty-three, Stevenson writes with unbounded courage,

"I must say I am a very bad workman, mais J'ai du courage; I am indefatigable at rewriting and lettering."¹

Two years later, he reports his progress thus,

"I am pioching, like a madman, at my stories, and can make nothing of them; my simplicity is tame and dull--my passion tinsel, boyish, hysterical. Never mind--ten years hence, if I live, I shall have learned, so help me God. I know one must work in the meantime (so says Balzac) comme le mineur enfoui sous un éboulement. J'y parviendrai, nom de nom de nom! But it's a long look forward."²

At thirty-seven, after twelve years of working "comme le mineur enfoui sous un éboulement," he gives this estimate of

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1. Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, 1873
 2. Letter to Sidney Colvin, 1875

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Two years later, he reports his progress thus:

"I am growing, like a madman, at my stories, and make nothing of them: my imagination is more and more my passion (never, perhaps, hysterical). Never mind--ten years hence, if I live, I shall have learned, so help me God, I know one what work in the meantime (as says Balzac) comes to mind. I am not an enthusiast. It's a long look for me at the moment! But it's a long look for me."

At thirty-seven, after twelve years of working "comme

un mineur," he gives this estimate of

himself.

"I imagine nobody had ever such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it day in and day out; and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world."¹

So that if actual labor and the capacity for taking pains were the only prerequisites of genius in literature, there is no doubt that Stevenson's name, like Abou Ben Adhem's, would lead all the rest.

1. Balfour, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 2, p. 199

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3. Use of the Imagination

"He who indulges habitually in the intoxicating pleasures of imagination, for the very reason that he reaps a greater pleasure than others, must resign himself to a keener pain, a more intolerable and utter prostration. It is quite possible, and even comparatively easy, so to enfold oneself in pleasant fancies that the realities of life may seem but as the white snow-shower in the street, that only gives a relish to the swept hearth and lively fire within. By such means I have forgotten hunger, I have sometimes eased pain, and I have invariably changed into the most pleasant hours of the day those very vacant and idle seasons which would otherwise have hung most heavily upon my hand. But all this is attained by the undue prominence of purely imaginative joys, and consequently the weakening and almost the destruction of reality. This is buying at too great a price. There are seasons when the imagination becomes somehow tranced and surfeited, as it is with me this morning; and then upon what can we fall back? The very faculty that we have fostered and trusted has failed us in the hour of trial; and we have so blunted and enfeebled our appetite for the others that they are subjectively dead to us. It is just as though a farmer should plant all his fields in potatoes, instead of varying them with grain and pasture; and so, when the disease comes, loses all his harvest, while his neighbours, perhaps, may balance the profit and the loss. Do not suppose that I am exaggerating when I talk about all pleasures seeming stale. To me, at least, the edge of almost everything is put on by imagination; and even nature, in these days when the fancy is drugged and useless, wants half the charm it has in better moments. I can no longer see satyrs in the thicket, or picture a highwayman riding down the lane. The fiat of indifference has gone forth: I am vacant, unprofitable: a leaf on a river with no volition and

"He who indulges habitually in the intoxicating pleasures of imagination, for the very reason that he reaps a greater pleasure than others, must resign himself to a keener pain, a more intolerable and bitter frustration. It is quite possible, and even comparatively easy, so to enfold oneself in pleasant fancies that the realities of life may seem out as the white snow-shower in the street, that only gives a relief to the sweet heart and lively life within. By such means I have forgotten hunger, I have sometimes eased pain, and I have inversely changed into the most pleasant hours of the day those very vacant and idle seasons which would otherwise have hung most heavily upon my hand. But all this is attained by the undue prominence of purely imaginative joys, and consequently the weakening and almost the destruction of reality. This is paying at too great a price. There are seasons when the imagination becomes somehow cramped and sufficed, as it is with me this morning; and then upon what can we fall back? The very faculty that we have fostered and trusted has failed us in the hour of trial; and we have so planned and enmeshed our appetite for the others that they are subjectively dead to us. It is just as though a farmer should plant all his fields in potatoes, instead of varying them with grain and pasture; and so, when the disease comes, loses all his harvest, while his neighbours, perhaps, may balance the profit and the loss. Do not suppose that I am exaggerating when I talk about all pleasures assuming a tale. To me, at least, the edge of almost everything is put on by imagination; and even nature, in those days when the fancy is drugged and useless, waits half the charm it has in better moments. I can no longer see actors in the thicket, or picture a highway-man riding down the lane. The riot of indifference has gone forth: I am vacant, unprofitable; a leaf on a river with no volition and

no aim: a mental drunkard the morning after an intellectual debauch. Yes, I have a more subtle opium in my own mind than any apothecary's drug; but it has a sting of its own, and leaves me as flat and helpless as does the other."¹

As Stevenson says in the dedication of Kidnapped, addressed to Charles Baxter, he is little touched by the desire for accuracy. Moreover, he is very lenient on the subject of anachronisms, not suggesting that the author carelessly make mistakes of this sort when they are avoidable, of course, but insisting that on the whole they make very little difference in art.

"If either Shakespeare, or Hugo, or Scott, for that matter, be guilty of figments enough to confuse the march of a whole history--anachronisms enough to upset all chronology--the life of their creations, the artistic truth and accuracy of their work, is not so much as compromised."²

The more vivid an imagination the author has, the better, but he should not overstep the bounds of common sense in an "unprincipled avidity after effect."³ Imagination is a fine quality, but unrestrained exaggeration is another thing; and when Victor Hugo says that a man was suffering so much that he kept pulling out his hair by the handful to see whether it was not getting white, and again that a man's thoughts were so

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1. A Retrospect
 2. Victor Hugo's Romances
 3. Ibid.

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unbearable that he tried to pull his head off his shoulders in order to crush it against the pavement, Stevenson enthusiastically applauds the statements as supreme examples of an unsurpassable imagination, but hardly as examples of artistic restraint, and certainly not to be imitated. Again, Hugo's scene which deals with the sinking of the "Ourque" in L'Homme Qui Rit makes Stevenson raise his hands in disapproval.

"But when we come upon a passage like the sinking of the 'Ourque' in this romance, we can do nothing but cover our face with our hands: the conscientious reader feels a sort of disgrace in the very reading. For such artistic falsehoods, springing from what I have called already an unprincipled avidity after effect, no amount of blame can be exaggerated; and above all when the criminal is such a man as Hugo.....Little as he seems to know of the sea and nautical affairs, he must have known very well that vessels do not go down as he makes the 'Ourque' go down; he must have known that such a liberty with fact was against the laws of the game, and incompatible with all appearances of sincerity in conception or workmanship."¹

To be truly imagined and fit for art, things must be both true and apparent. Even if a thing is true, its truth is of no value unless it is readily apparent and plausible to the reader's mind. Thus, Stevenson says, there are two kinds of imagination: the fustian and the sincere; and to illustrate

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what he means, he uses a story by Poe, Arthur Gordon Pym, as an example.

"The four survivors on board the brig Grampus have lashed themselves to the windlass, lest they should be swept away; one of them, having drawn his lashings too tight, is ready to yield up his spirit for a long while, is nearly cut in two, indeed, by the cord about his loins. 'No sooner had we removed it, however,' Poe goes on, 'than he spoke and seemed to experience instant relief--being able to move with much greater ease than Parker or myself. This was no doubt owing to the loss of blood.' Now, whether medically correct or not, this is, on the face of it, sincerely imagined. Whether or not in fact, it is correct in art. Poe evidently believed it true; evidently it appeared to him that thus, and not otherwise, the thing would fall out."¹

As an example of the fustian sort of imagination, Stevenson refers to Poe's account of Pym's visions while he was thus lashed to the windlass. It seems that motion was the predominant factor in these visions, and that no stationary object passed before his eyes.

"This may be true; it may be the result of great erudition in the thoughts of people in such sore straits; but the imagination does not adopt these details, they do not commend themselves to our acceptance, it is nowise apparent why stationary objects should not present themselves to the fancy of a man tied to the windlass of a dismantled brig; and, this being so, the whole passage, as art, stands condemned.....To make what I mean clear; Mr. Ruskin, in some one or other of his delightful books, quotes and approves a poet

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4. Use of Recollection

(I think it was Homer) who said of a brave man that he was as brave as a fly; and proceeds, in his usual happy manner to justify the epithet. The fly, he tells us, is in very deed the most madly courageous of all created beings. And therefore the simile is good--excellently good. And yet the reader's instinct would tell him, I am sure, that the simile is a vile simile. Let him prefer his instinct before Mr. Ruskin's natural history. For though it be based on what is true, this comparison is not based upon a truth that is apparent; it does not commend itself to our acceptance; it is not art."¹

of childhood which has seldom if ever been shown in a higher degree, or has existed except along with intellectual powers of a very considerable calibre. It related also to the ordinary sensations of activity. We have all been active and all been tired, but who has given us such pictures of activity and of fatigue as Stevenson?"¹

Probably because the memories of his own childhood and youth were such an indispensable part of the man, and the writer delved into them with so much profit, Stevenson thinks that the author, time and again, can use the matter of his recollections to great advantage. And the obvious thing is that the repeated use of cherished memories for the purpose of literature in no degree lessens their freshness for their possessor.

"Those who try to be artists use, time after time, the matter of their recollections, setting and resetting little colored pictures of men and scenes, rigging up (it may

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4. Use of Recollection

"Stevenson had no vast memory like Scott's, but he remembered to a most unusual extent his own emotions and sensations, and the events of his past life, and what remained in his mind preserved its freshness and a lifelike sharpness of outline. If Stevenson's claim to genius is to be based upon any single gift, it is this quality that most deserves such recognition. The paper on Child's Play and the Child's Garden of Verses display a power of returning to the ideas and feelings of childhood which has seldom if ever been shown in a higher degree, or has existed except along with intellectual powers of a very considerable calibre. It related also to the ordinary sensations of maturity. We have all been active and all been tired, but who has given us such pictures of activity and of fatigue as Stevenson?"¹

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1. Balfour, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 202

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be) some especial friend in the attire of a buccaneer, and decreeing armies to manoeuvre, or murder to be done, on the playground of their youth. But the memories are a fairy gift which cannot be worn out in using. After a dozen services in various tales, the little sunbright pictures of the past still shine in the mind's eye with not a lineament defaced, not a tint impaired. Gluck and ungluck wird gesang, if Goethe pleases; yet only by endless avatars, the original re-embodiment after each."¹

One of the main characteristics of Hazlitt which delight Stevenson is "the loving and tender way in which he returns again to the memory of the past."² The two authors are kindred spirits in this particular respect, but that which interests Stevenson is not the recent past. That is still so vivid in his mind that its effect is but a blur, and those impressions, important in themselves or significant to him because of their particular association, which he will retain, have not yet been made to stand out in sharp outline by the dissolution of those more or less negative memories which time automatically blots out.

"When our recollections have been strained long enough through the hourglass of time, all that is worthless has been sieved and sifted out of them. Nothing remains but the brightest lights and the darkest shadows.... We require to draw back and shade our eyes before the picture dawns upon us in full breadth and outline."³

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1. Memoirs of an Islet
 2. A Retrospect
 3. Ibid.

On this same principle of allowing time to erase the insignificant, Stevenson advises the author who plans to write essays or books of travel to let a considerable period of time elapse between his journeyings and the attempt to write about them. But the point is that the traveller must judge to a nicety the length of time during which he should allow the soup to simmer. If the delay is too prolonged, he runs the risk of being very vague about pertinent facts, though it must be noticed that most travellers, journeying with the intention of writing about their experiences, would ordinarily take notes to which they could refer later, while Stevenson does no writing at all during his excursions, thinking that it will interfere later with the selection of his important impressions. If the delay is not prolonged enough, time has not had the chance to do its weeding, and the author, because his experience is still too new and vivid, finds himself unable to pick out the truly significant from the unimportant.

"I cannot describe a thing that is before me at the moment, or that has been before me only a very little while before; I must allow my recollections to get thoroughly strained free from all chaff till nothing be left except the pure gold; allow my memory to choose out what is truly memorable by a process of natural selection; and I piously believe that in this way I ensure the Survival of the Fittest. If I make notes for future use, or if I am obliged to write letters during the course of my little excursions, I so interfere with the process that I can never

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5. Collaboration again find out what is worthy of being preserved, or what should be given in full length, what in torso, or what merely in profile."¹

Stevenson wrote The Wrecker in collaboration with Mrs. Stevenson, The Kidnapper, The Wrecker, and The Strange Box with his step-son, Lloyd Osbourne, and several plays with H. E. Henley, so that when he talks about collaboration, he talks from experience. And his verdict is that the disadvantages of this method of writing far outweigh the advantages. Its greatest drawback is that a piece of work done by one person alone has a greater degree of unity than one worked over by two individual personalities with different styles and different techniques. Its main advantage, obviously, is that two minds focussed on the same material can produce "an extraordinarily greater richness of purview, consideration, and invention."¹

Collaboration is considered possible by Stevenson under only one condition: that one of the collaborators supervise the work and be responsible for the final draft. The partnership must perforce be unequal, one of the members submitting to the judgment of his more experienced partner. And even when the partnership officiates under this charter, there are difficulties which can hardly be surmounted. Fresh from the experience of writing The Wrecker, Stevenson thus

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5. Collaboration

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from the experience of writing The Wrecker, Stevenson thus

explains the limitations inherent in the method.

"The great difficulty of collaboration is that you can't explain what you mean. I know what kind of effect I mean a character to give--what kind of tache he is to make; but how am I to tell my collaborator in words?.....I, as a personal artist, can begin a character with only a haze in my head, but how if I have to translate the haze into words before I begin? In our manner of collaboration I was spared the obviously hopeless business of trying to explain to my collaborator what style I wished a passage to be treated in. These are the times that illustrate to a man the inadequacy of spoken language. Now--to be just to written language--I can (or could) find a language for my every mood, but how could I tell any one beforehand what this effect was to be, which it would take every art that I possessed, and hours and hours of deliberate labour and selection and rejection, to produce? These are the impossibilities of collaboration."¹

Collaboration, then, really could be described as a partnership engulfed by darkness and the inability to express itself, but, for all that, a partnership consistently working at cross purposes. The plays which Stevenson wrote with Henley certainly have not added to his reputation. It may be that he had no special aptitude for dramatic composition. Or it may be, as we suspect when we read Mrs. Stevenson's account of the two working together, that Stevenson's temperament and Henley's, Stevenson's technique and that of his partner, were so at sixes and sevens that the two men are probably the

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"The plays were invented and written in the fervid, boisterous fashion of Mr. Henley, whose influence predominated, except in the actual literary form. A very thin, elastic scenario was first sketched out, which was afterwards greatly extended and elaborated in a series of paragraphs contributed alternately by each author. It was agreed between them that did one object to what the other had written, it should be stricken out without argument--a proceeding that I cannot but believe was damaging to the work of both. My husband's view of play-writing was to make a literary tour de force, built on the old conventions, Mr. Henley's to startle the public. 'That'll make 'em jump, my boy!' Mr. Henley would shout, striking the table till the ink-bottle rattled. 'No, Henley,' my husband would protest wearily, 'you're too violent. That must be toned down.' But, according to the agreement, it had to be thrown out, and in the new attack something would be lost by both."¹

Stevenson himself was vitally interested in every thing connected, even remotely, with art; he was particularly engrossed in the problems of literature; but his greatest interest, first and last, centered on matters pertaining to narrative technique. This is not surprising since, as I have briefly mentioned before, he looks on narrative as the most typical, and therefore the best, sort of literature.

1. Mrs. Stevenson, Preface of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

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III. Theory of Narrative

A. Definition of Narrative

Fired with a consuming interest in the mechanical, or technical, aspects of literature, Stevenson often bemoaned the public's general lack of concern in such matters.

"Seriously, from the dearth of information and thoughtful interest in the art of literature, those who try to practice it with any deliberate purpose run the risk of finding no fit audience. People suppose it is 'the stuff' that interests them; they think, for instance, that the prodigious fine thoughts and sentiments in Shakespeare impress by their own weight, not understanding that the unpolished diamond is but a stone. They think that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions."¹

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Stevenson himself was vitally interested in everything connected, even remotely, with art; he was particularly engrossed in the problems of literature; but his greatest interest, first and last, centered on matters pertaining to narrative technique. This is not surprising since, as I have briefly mentioned before, he looks on narrative as the most typical, and therefore the best, mood of literature.

"The true business of literature is with narrative; in reasoned narrative, and there alone, art enjoys all its advantages and suffers least from its defects. Dry precept and disembodied disquisition, as they can only be read with an effort of abstraction, can never convey a perfectly complete or a perfectly natural impression. Truth, even in literature, must be clothed with flesh and blood, or it cannot tell its whole story to the reader. Hence the effect of anecdote on simple minds; and hence good biographies and works of high, imaginative art, are not only far more entertaining, but far more edifying, than books of theory or precept."¹

The art of narrative consists in "the clear conception of certain characters of man, the choice and presentation of certain incidents out of a great number that offered, and the invention (yes, invention) and preservation of a certain key in dialogue."² These are the principles which the historian, the biographer, the story-teller, and, in short, every writer whose purpose is to narrate, must obey. Whether the narrator writes in prose or in verse, whether he deals with events that actually happened or only with those that he has imagined, the principles are the same.

"Whether a narrative be written in blank verse or the Spenserian stanza, in the long period of Gibbon or the chipped phrase of Charles Reade, the principles of the art of narrative must be equally observed. The choice of a noble and swelling style in prose affects the problem of narration in the same way, if not to the same degree, as the choice of measured verse; for both imply a

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1. Henry David Thoreau
 2. A Humble Remonstrance

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closer synthesis of events, a higher key of dialogue, and a more picked and stately strain of words."¹

"The art of narrative, in fact, is the same, whether it is applied to the selection and illustration of a real series of events or of an imaginary series. Boswell's Life of Johnson owes its success to the same technical manoeuvres as (let us say) Tom Jones. In which these things are done with the more art--in which with the greater air of nature--readers will differently judge. Boswell's is, indeed, a very special case, and almost a generic; but it is not only in Boswell, it is in every biography with any salt of life, it is in every history where events and men, rather than ideas, are presented--in Tacitus, in Carlyle, in Michelet, in Macaulay--that the novelist will find many of his own methods most conspicuously and adroitly handled. He will find besides that he, who is free--who has the right to invent or steal a missing incident, who has the right, more precious still, of wholesale omission--is frequently defeated, and with all his advantages, leaves a less strong impression of reality and passion."²

It has been seen that Stevenson believes that any one with a modicum of talent and sufficient perserverance can teach himself to write. Not so with the actual business of narrating. A born story-teller himself, he apparently believes that one is either born with or without the knack of telling a story, whether it be a real story or a fictitious one. Few people, he thinks, possess this narrative sense, or the ability to view events not merely in relation to their immediate significance, but with an understanding of their causation and results.

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And if few men have a genuine narrative talent, fewer yet have the wit to recognize it or to understand it when it is present. Shaw is one of the few in whom he himself recognizes it, and he describes it as one consisting of "strength, spirit, capacity, sufficient vision, and sufficient self-sacrifice, which last is the chief point in a narrator."¹ Unfortunately, Stevenson does not explain why self-sacrifice should be the chief point in a narrator, and I, for one, must admit that I am totally in the dark concerning why this should be so. One might suggest that the narrator should be willing to spare himself no pains to render his stories, fiction or non-fiction, as technically perfect as he can; but, then, so should all other artists be ready to make sacrifices in the name of perfection. Or does it mean that the narrator must possess the ability of removing his personality from the field of operations, as it were, in order to deal more objectively with his material? This explanation, feeble at best, is more or less invalidated by the fact that Stevenson wrote many of his stories in the first person, one of the reasons for which procedure, I suspect, was that it enabled him to share in the adventures in his own person. And I am still in the dark.

Whatever self-sacrifice may, or may not, mean in this particular case, however, the narrator should concern himself primarily with certain classes of facts which are the most

1. Letter to William Archer, 1888

interesting and the most beneficial to man.

"Those which are coloured, picturesque, human, and rooted in morality, and those, on the other hand, which are clear, indisputable, and a part of science, are alone vital in importance, seizing by their interest or useful to communicate. So far as the writer merely narrates, he should principally tell of these. He should tell of the kind and wholesome and beautiful elements of our life; he should tell unsparingly of the evil and sorrow of the present, to move us with instances; he should tell of wise and good people in the past, to excite us by example; and of these he should tell soberly and truthfully, not glossing faults, that we may neither grow discouraged with ourselves nor exacting to our neighbours."¹

Vividness, naturally, is one of the main qualities for which the narrator should strive, but there is another factor, even more important, which should always walk at least two steps ahead of vividness, and that is exactness, or truth to the fact.

"In all narration there is only one way to be clever, and that is to be exact. To be vivid is a secondary quality which must presuppose the first, for vividly to convey a wrong impression is only to make failure conspicuous."²

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B. The Genesis of "The Master of Ballantrae"

It seems fitting to preface the discussion of narrative technique by Stevenson's account of how the story of The Master of Ballantrae first came to his mind as he paced the porch of his house at Saranac on a cold winter's night. It is a long passage, but since it has to do with the evolution of plot, character, and setting, and shows what assistance memory can give in the construction of plot and character, it is particularly significant for us at this stage. Moreover, the passage is interesting in itself, if for no other reason than that it presents Stevenson, one thought immediately suggesting another in an intellectual avalanche, in the first rapturous throes of the creation of one of his best known books.

"I was walking one night in the verandah of a small house in which I lived, outside the hamlet of Saranac. It was winter; the night was very dark; the air extraordinarily clear and cold, and sweet with the purity of forests. From a good way below, the river was to be heard contending with ice and boulders: a few lights appeared, scattered unevenly among the darkness, but so far away as not to lessen the sense of isolation. For the making of a story here were fine conditions. I was besides moved with the spirit of emulation, for I had just finished my third or fourth perusal of The Phantom Ship. 'Come,' said I to my engine, 'let us make a tale, a story of many years and countries, of the sea and land, savagery and civilisation; a story that shall have the same large features and may be treated in the same large elliptic

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method as the book you have been reading and admiring.' I was here brought up with a reflection exceedingly just in itself, but which, as the sequel shows, I failed to profit by. I saw that Marryat, not less than Homer, Milton, and Virgil, profited by the choice of a familiar and legendary subject; so that he prepared his readers on the very title-page; and this set me cudgelling my brains, if by any chance I could hit upon some similar belief to be the centerpiece of my own meditated fiction. In the course of this vain search there cropped up in my memory a singular case of a buried and resuscitated fakir, which I had been told by an uncle of mine, then lately dead, John Balfour.

On such a fine frosty night, with no wind and the thermometer below zero, the brain works with much vivacity; and the next moment I had seen the circumstance transplanted from India and the tropics to the Adirondack wilderness and the stringent cold of the Canadian border. Here, then, almost before I had begun my story, I had two countries, two of the ends of the earth involved: and thus though the notion of the resuscitated man failed entirely on the score of general acceptation, or even (as I have since found) acceptability, it fitted at once with my design of a tale of many lands; and this decided me to consider further of its possibilities. The man who should thus be buried was the first question: a good man, whose return to life would be hailed by the reader and the other characters with gladness? This trenched upon the Christian picture and was dismissed. If the idea, then, was to be of any use at all for me, I had to create a kind of evil genius to his friends and family, take him through many disappearances, and make this final restoration from the pit of death, in the icy American wilderness, the last and grimmest of the series. I need not tell my brothers of the craft that I was now in the most interesting moment of an author's life; the hours

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that followed that night upon the balcony, and the following nights and days, whether walking abroad or lying wakeful in my bed, were hours of unadulterated joy. My mother, who was then living with me alone, perhaps had less enjoyment; for, in the absence of my wife, who is my usual helper in these times of parturition, I must spur her up at all seasons to hear me relate and try to clarify my unformed fancies.

And while I was groping for the fable and the characters required, behold, I found them lying ready and nine years old in my memory. Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot, nine years old. Was there ever a more complete justification of the rule of Horace? Here, thinking of quite other things, I had stumbled on the solution, or perhaps I should rather say (in stagewright phrase) the Curtain or Final Tableau of a story conceived long before on the moors between Pitlochry and Strathardle..... So long ago, so far away it was, that I had first evoked the faces and the mutual tragic situation of the men of Durisdeer.

My story was now world-wide enough: Scotland, India, America being all obligatory scenes. But of these India was strange to me except in books; I had never known any living Indian save a Parsee, a member of my club in London, equally civilised and (to all seeing) equally occidental with myself. It was plain, thus far, that I should have to get into India and out of it again upon a foot of fairy lightness; and I believe this first suggested to me the idea of the Chevalier Burke for a narrator. It was at first intended that he should be Scottish, and I was then filled with fears that he might prove only the degraded shadow of my own Alan Breck. Presently, however, it began to occur to me it would be like my Master to curry favour with the Prince's Irishmen; and that an Irish refugee would have a particular reason to find himself in India

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C. Narrative Techniques with Particular Relation to the Novel and the Short Story

1. The Novel

with his countryman, the unfortunate Lally. Irish, therefore, I decided he should be, and then, all of a sudden, I was aware of a tall shadow across my path, the shadow of Barry Lyndon. No man (in Lord Foppington's phrase) of a nice morality could go very deep with my Master: in the original idea of this story conceived in Scotland, this companion had been besides intended to be worse than the bad elder son with whom (as it was then meant) he was to visit Scotland: if I took an Irishman, and a very bad Irishman, in the midst of the eighteenth century, how was I to evade Barry Lyndon? The wretch besieged me, offering his services; he gave me excellent references; he proved that he was highly fitted for the work I had to do; he, or my own evil heart, suggested it was easy to disguise his ancient livery with a little lace and a few frogs and buttons, so that Thackeray himself should hardly recognise him. And then of a sudden there came to me memories of a young Irishman, with whom I was once intimate, and had spent long nights walking and talking with, upon a very desolate coast in a bleak autumn: I recalled him as a youth of an extraordinary moral simplicity--almost vacancy; plastic to any influence, the creature of his admirations; and putting such a youth in fancy into the career of a soldier of fortune, it occurred to me that he would serve my turn as well as Mr. Lyndon, and in place of entering into competition with the Master, would afford a slight though a distinct relief. I know not if I have done him well, though his moral dissertations always highly entertained me: but I own I have been surprised to find that he reminded some critics of Barry Lyndon after all."¹

Walter Besant and Henry James in their essays pertaining to the qualities and aims of the novel, to which reference has already been made, refer to "the art of fiction" almost

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1. The Novel

"Anybody can write a short story--a bad one, I mean--who has industry and paper and time enough; but not everyone may hope to write a bad novel. It is the length that kills. The accepted novelist may take his novel up and put it down, spend days upon it in vain, and write not any more than he makes haste to blot. Not so the beginner. Human nature has certain rights; instinct--the instinct of self-preservation--forbids that any man (cheered and supported by the consciousness of no previous victory) should endure the miseries of unsuccessful literary toil beyond a period to be measured in weeks. There must be something for hope to feed upon. The beginner must have a slant of wind, a lucky vein must be running, he must be in one of those hours when the words come and the phrases balance of themselves--even to begin. And having begun, what a dread looking forward is that until the book shall be accomplished! For so long a time, the slant is to continue unchanged, the vein to keep running, for so long a time you must keep at command the same quality of style; for so long a time your puppets are to be always vital, always consistent, always vigorous! I remember I used to look, in those days, upon every three-volume novel with some sort of veneration, as a feat--not possible of literature--but at least of physical and moral endurance and the courage of Ajax."1

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1. My First Book, prefixed to Treasure Island

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as a synonym for the term novel. Stevenson makes it a point to object strenuously to the use of the expression in this particular connection. As he sees it, one can no more talk intelligently about the art of fiction as applicable only to imaginative story-telling than one could say that poetry, "that heat and height of sane emotion," is never found outside the art of verse. The two, fiction and poetry, are free, wandering qualities, as it were, which are present in all the arts except architecture.

"Homer, Wordsworth, Phidias, Hogarth, and Salvini, all deal in fiction; and yet I do not suppose that either Hogarth or Salvini, mention but these two, entered in any degree into the scope of Mr. Besant's interesting lecture or Mr. James' charming essay. The art of fiction, then, regarded as a definition, is both too ample and too scanty. Let me suggest another; let me suggest that what both Mr. James and Mr. Besant had in view was neither more nor less than the art of narrative."¹

In the same summary manner, he rejects the term, "the modern English novel," as too vague for a fruitful discussion of the novel; and by the time he is through, he has transformed "the art of fiction" into "the art of fictitious narrative in prose," a change which, one must admit, is a great improvement in clearness and exactness. He adds "fictitious" to the definition because the principles of narrative are the same

1. A Humble Remonstrance

whether the events narrated are real or imaginary; "in prose" is included because many stories in verse contain more of the material of the novel than many so-called novels do.

"The Odyssey appears to me the best of romances; The Lady of the Lake to stand high in the second order; and Chaucer's tales and prologues to contain more of the matter and art of the modern English novel than the whole treasure of Mr. Mudie."¹

Beyond this relatively unimportant question of terms, James and Stevenson differ sharply in their opinions concerning the aims and desirable characteristics of the novel. James, it will be remembered, thinks that the novelist "competes with life" in that he attempts to produce an illusion of actual life by presenting a picture, without apparent rearrangement, pulsating with "the strange irregular rhythm of life;" Stevenson, on the other hand, avers that the novelist, instead of vying with the complexities of life, rearranges it with the help of every artistic artifice at his command, in order to present a picture that is significant in its simplification rather than kaleidoscopic and confusing in its complexity.

"The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work."²

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James, to mention one of the few points on which the two authors agree before continuing with those on which they disagree, says that the novelist should write only from experience, although he hastens to mitigate the dogmatic statement by adding that the word should not be interpreted too literally since, to a sensitive, imaginative person, impressions, "the faintest hints of life," constitute experience. Stevenson approves of this protestation against too narrow a conception of experience, for, in his opinion, a man writes with even more effect and more gusto of those things which he has only wished to do than of those which he has actually done. While commenting on Treasure Island, he remarks that he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, that he has always desired that experience, and that as a result the whole idea, when he dealt with it imaginatively, had a freshness and a romantic appeal for him which actual experience might have lessened to a considerable degree.

To James, character, dialogue, description, and incident are not factors with a kind of "internecine distinctness," but intimately interwoven parts of the novel, bound one in all and all in one. A passage of description is always in intention narrative; a passage of dialogue is in intention

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1. James, The Art of Fiction
 2. Stevenson, A Memoir of Robert Louis Stevenson

James, to mention one of the few points on which the two authors agree before continuing with those on which they disagree, says that the novelist should write only from experience, although he hastens to mitigate the dogmatic statement by adding that the word should not be interpreted too literally since, to a sensitive, imaginative person, impressions, "the faintest hints of life," constitute experience. Stevenson approves of this protestation against too narrow a conception of experience, for, in his opinion, a man writes with even more effect and more gusto of those things which he has only wished to do than of those which he has actually done. While commenting on Treasure Island, he remarks that he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, that he has always desired that experience, and that as a result the whole idea, when he dealt with it imaginatively, had a freshness and a romantic appeal for him which actual experience might have lessened to a considerable degree.

To James, character, dialogue, description, and incident are not factors with a kind of "intermediate distinctness," but intimately interwoven parts of the novel, bound one in all and all in one. A passage of description is always in intention narrative; a passage of dialogue is in intention

descriptive; and so on. All novels contain character as all novels contain incident of one sort or another, so, to James, it is pure nonsense to call one novel a novel of character and another a novel of incident. As a matter of fact, the only distinction among novels which he acknowledges is that between bad ones and good ones.

"There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning, and I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character."¹

It follows, therefore, that the novelist will never greatly vary his method in the presentation of his material. He will always write just about the same kind of novel after he has once chosen and developed his individual method. But Stevenson definitely says no to all this. As he says, "The life of man is not the subject of novels, but the inexhaustible magazine from which subjects are to be selected; and the name of these is legion; and with each new subject--for here again I must differ the whole width of heaven from Mr. James--the true artist will vary his method and change the point of attack."² The ultimate division of novels is into the good and the bad, of course, but there are distinctions which are more significant than that comprehensive one: there are

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- 1. James, The Art of Fiction
 - 2. Stevenson, A Man's Remembrance

novels of character, novels of adventure, and dramatic novels. Character, incident, and all the other elements of the novel do melt into one another at each breath, as James insists; but it is possible to subordinate character to incident as in the novel of adventure, it is possible to subordinate incident to character as in the novel of character, and it is possible to subordinate both character and action to the exaltation of passion as in the dramatic novel. And the conscientious novelist, realizing that what was the excellence of one book may be the undoing of another, first decides what type of novel he wants to write, and then adapts his method accordingly. For purposes of illustration, Stevenson discusses the characteristics of these three main classes of novels already alluded to; and, very calmly and obligingly, enlightens James on the fact that the type of novel which he, James, usually writes is none other than the novel of character.

The name of the novel of adventure aptly describes its characteristics. This elementary type of novel deals with danger, and the emotion it strives to arouse in the reader is that of fear. The characters are merely secondary to the plot, and their chief function is to circumstantiate it. This being the case, they need but one set of traits--"the

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warlike and the formidable."¹ If they but evoke in the reader a feeling of danger and of fear, they amply fulfill all the requirements. And if the novelist tries to go beyond these simple elements by drawing his characters too minutely, if he tries to make his story too complex by adding too many different threads of thought to it, he runs the risk of spoiling it completely.

"To add more traits, to be too clever, to start the hare of moral or intellectual interest while we are running the fox of material interest, is not to enrich but to stultify your tale. The stupid reader will only be offended, and the clever reader lose the scent."²

What Stevenson calls the novel of character is often called the novel of adventure by other people because it requires no coherency of plot. As is obvious from its name, the emphasis is placed on the moods and humors of the characters depicted. There are incidents, of course, to give body to these humors, but in this case the incidents are secondary, and thus need not move in progression. The characters must be consistent throughout, as characters must be under any circumstances, but they may be presented statically. They may come in, show us the intricacies of their natures, and at the end of the novel go out exactly as they were when they came in. Passion may be employed, but it is never presented

1. A Humble Remonstrance
2. Ibid.

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directly to our eyes. We may know that a character is passionately moved, but we do not actually see him while he is thus aroused. Scenes of passionate or tragical significance are presented through the ears of an eavesdropper or casual visitor standing near the closed door of the room in which the action is taking place, or through any other such subterfuge. In short, this type of novelist treats, for the most part, "the statics of character, studying it at rest or only gently moved; and avoids those stronger passions which would deform the attitudes he loves to study, and change his sitters from the humourists of ordinary life to the brute forces, and bare types of more emotional moments."¹

The dramatic novel is analogous to a serious play in that it is based on one of those crises of life where there is a violent conflict between duty and inclination. There are no subterfuges here to conceal the workings of passion. Everything is shown to the reader, and passion, which must increase progressively as it does in the serious drama, is the whole reason of being for this class of novel. The characters may be drawn at full length and in great detail, or they may be mere abstractions. There is no hard and fast rule on this

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point, since it does not matter how they are portrayed so long as they are carried out of themselves by the frenzy of passion unleashed.

"A novel of this class may be great, and yet contain no individual figure; it may be great, because it displays the workings of the perturbed heart and the impersonal utterance of passion; and with an artist of the second class it is, indeed, even more likely to be great, when the issue has thus been narrowed and the whole force of the writer's mind directed to passion alone."¹

Cleverness, which is allowed free rein in the novel of character, should not appear on this serious stage. The author should be straightforward right through, evading no issue, however ingeniously, when he has led the reader to expect a passionate crisis. Moreover, flimsy motives and the trivial accidents of life are absolutely out of focus in a tragical setting of this sort, for "when the passions are introduced in art at their full height, we look to see them, not baffled and impotently striving, as in life, but towering above circumstance and acting substitutes for fate."²

Stevenson also admits that there are such things as "novels with a purpose," but he tries to preserve his cheerful disposition by overlooking them as much as possible. He has no patience whatsoever with the novelist who forces

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Stevenson also admits that there are such things as "novels with a purpose," but he tries to preserve his cheerful disposition by overlooking them as much as possible. He has no patience whatsoever with the novelist who forces

his moral on the reader from every page. The moral end of a novel should coincide with its artistic effect instead of being thrown over the book like a gigantic beach umbrella. Every great novel, he thinks, has an underlying moral or philosophical idea, but that is different from saying that novels should have a purpose, as the expression is usually interpreted with relation to the English novel. Hugo's novels, for instance, are constructed "with a high regard to some ulterior purpose, and every situation is informed with moral significance and grandeur,"¹ but the moral significance and the artistic effect are worked out together and coincide so exactly as to be one.

Stevenson also finds that there is an epical value in most of the novels of Victor Hugo, who "is no longer content with expressing the more or less abstract relations of man to man, and has set before himself the task of realizing, in the language of romance, much of the involution of our complicated lives."² And, Stevenson says, there is an epical value in every great novel, though, measured by this standard, few novels can be called great. Referring to the epical quality which characterizes Hugo's works, he says,

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"This epical value is not to be found, let it be understood, in every so-called novel. The great majority are not works of art in anything but a very secondary signification. One might almost number on one's fingers the works in which such a supreme artistic intention has been in any way superior to the other and lesser aims, themselves more or less artistic, that generally go hand in hand with it in the conception of prose romance. The purely critical spirit is, in most novels, paramount."¹

Again, novels that deal with trades close to nature, with occupations that have been an experience of the human race from time immemorial, tend to have more of an epic weight, and to arouse a readier and a more permanent interest in a greater number of readers than do those which have to do with the manners and superficial occupations of the day.

"The fortune of a tale lies not alone in the skill of him that writes, but as much, perhaps, in the inherited experience of him who reads; and when I hear with a particular thrill of things I have never done or seen, it is one of that innumerable army of my ancestors rejoicing in past deeds... Novels begin to touch the gross mass of mankind when they leave off to speak of parlours and shades of manner, and begin to deal with fighting, sailing, adventure, death, or child-birth. Thus ancient outdoor crafts and occupations lift romance into a near neighborhood with epic."²

In the section dealing with romance, reference was made to the importance which Stevenson attaches to striking incident, or "pictorial or picture-making romance," in the

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novel. Thus, an important point in his theory of narrative is that in a well-told novel, the threads of the story should converge, now and then, in flash-of-lightning scenes that embody the very soul of the story, unforgettable scenes with an imperishable pictorial quality that is given significance by the dramatic or moral implication.

"The threads of a story come from time to time together and make a picture in the web; the characters fall from time to time into some attitude to each other or to nature, which stamps the story home like an illustration. Crusoe recoiling from the footprint, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears, these are each culminating moments in the legend, and each has been printed on the mind's eye forever. Other things we may forget; we may forget the words, although they are beautiful; we may forget the author's comment, although perhaps it was ingenious and true; but these epoch-making scenes, which put the last mark of truth upon a story and fill up, at one blow, our capacity for sympathetic pleasure, we so adopt into the very bosom of our mind that neither time nor tide can efface or weaken the impression. This, then, is the plastic part of literature: to embody character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye. This is the highest and hardest thing to do in words; the thing which, once accomplished, equally delights the schoolboy and the sage, and makes, in its own right, the quality of epics. Compared with this, all other purposes in literature, except the purely lyrical or the purely philosophic, are bastard in nature, facile of execution, and

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feeble in result. It is one thing to write about the inn at Burford, or to describe scenery with the word-painters; it is quite another to seize on the heart of the suggestion and make a country famous with a legend. It is one thing to remark and to dissect, with the most cutting logic, the complications of life, and of the human spirit; it is quite another to give them body and blood in the story of Ajax or of Hamlet. The first is literature, but the second is something besides, for it is likewise art."¹

"In the highest achievements of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law. Situation is animated with passion, passion clothed upon with situation. Neither exists for itself, but each inheres indissolubly with the other. This is high art; and not only the highest art possible in words, but the highest art of all, since it combines the greatest mass and diversity of the elements of truth and pleasure. Such are the epics, and the few prose tales that have the epic weight."²

Stevenson is keenly conscious that the novelist can embody emotions and effects that are forever out of the reach of the drama. In that it deals with real things instead of with artistic conventions for things, the drama enjoys a peculiar kind of realism, but he thinks that the novel gains in liberty and competence with the loss of every degree of this type of realism. It loses greatly in vividness, of course, but the greater control which the novelist gains over his subject more than compensates for this loss. There are

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1. A Gossip on Romance
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no limits whatsoever to what the novelist can portray, and there are no restrictions for him either of time or space.

"He can render just as easily the flourish of trumpets before a victorious emperor, the gossip of country market women, the gradual decay of forty years of a man's life, and the gesture of a passionate moment. He finds himself equally able, if he looks at it from one point of view--equally unable if he looks at it from another point of view--to reproduce a color, a sound, an outline, a logical argument, a physical action. He can show his readers, behind and around the personages that for the moment occupy the foreground of his story, the continual suggestion of the landscape; the turn of the weather that will turn with it men's lives and fortunes, dimly fore-shadowed on the horizon; the fatality of distant events, the stream of national tendency, the framework of causation. And all this entering, naturally and smoothly, into the texture of continuous intelligent narration."¹

that it had been transcribed directly from actual happenings or actual life. Since the actual is not necessarily true, at least as far as art is concerned, and since the novel is nothing but a simplification of life, or rather of some significant phase of life, the novelist's aim should be to rearrange and to clarify the materials which life presents. As Stevenson explains it to the young novelist,

"And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude, but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity. For, although, in great men, working upon great motives, what we observe and admire is often their complexity, yet underneath appearances the

1. Victor Hugo's Romances

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a. Plot

A novel, according to Stevenson, is not to be judged by its fidelity in portraying the material detail of the manners of the day and the tone of conversation, or by the faithful reproduction of the atmosphere and environment. He thinks that a novel may be excellent and yet emphasize none of these points, for, since the novel is not a transcript of life, the novelist is not called upon to give a literal picture of even a single day of actual life. A conversation is reported to have taken place at Vailima--Stevenson's home in Samoa--between Stevenson and his step-daughter, Mrs. Isobel Strong, in which he remarked that whenever he came upon a passage in a story that sounded untrue, he always suspected that it had been transcribed directly from actual happenings or actual life. Since the actual is not necessarily true, at least as far as art is concerned, and since the novel is nothing but a simplification of life, or rather of some significant phase of life, the novelist's aim should be to rearrange and to clarify the materials which life presents. As Stevenson explains it to the young novelist,

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truth remains unchanged: that simplification was their method, and that simplicity is their excellence."¹

The only way to attain this simplicity is to choose a motive, a dominating thought of some sort, that will direct the work and serve as a touchstone in the selection of material. In all cases and at all times, the novelist should work by judicious selection, and it is a point worthy of notice that this process of selection should comprise more rejection and omission than actual selection. The novelist should not attempt to tell everything, but should include only those points which mean the most in the revelation of character or that contribute the most to the development of his plot. He should not feel constrained to include in his account all those unimportant things that relate to actual life, simply because they are a part of actual life; instead he should concentrate on those aspects of life which seem the most real to him, and for the moment, the most important. From the multitude of events that may present themselves to his mind, he selects his incidents and details with regard to their pertinence to his main design. He should not include the slightest incident nor a single detail that is not an illustration of the particular motive which he has selected. And whatever else he may learn, the novelist should realize and remember

1. A Humble Remonstrance

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that omission is oftentimes an art, particularly when he feels tempted to include vivid effects which have no definite relation to his plot.

"Let the young novelist choose a motive, whether of character or passion: carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast..... And let him allow neither himself in the narrative, nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. Let him not regret if this shortens his book: it will be better so; for to add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen but to bury. Let him not mind if he miss a thousand qualities, so that he keeps unflaggingly in pursuit of the one he has chosen."¹

"Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each fact, as in marshalling all of them towards a common end.....From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences, the well-written novel echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this; and if there is anywhere a word that looks another way, the book would be stronger, clearer, and (I had almost said), fuller without it."²

"Nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, expedite the progress of the fable, build up the characters, and strike home the moral or the philosophical design."³

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1. A Humble Remonstrance
 2. Ibid.
 3. A Note on Realism

that omission is often times an art, particularly when he feels tempted to include vivid effects which have no definite relation to his plot.

"Let the young novelist choose a motive, whether of character or passion; carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every properly employed scene to it a near relation of contrast..... And let him allow neither himself in the narrative nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. Let him not regret if this shortens his book; it will be better so; for to add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen out to bury. Let him not mind if he misses a thousand qualities, so that he keeps unflinchingly in pursuit of the one he has chosen."

"Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each fact, as in marshalling all of them towards a common end..... From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences, the well-written novel echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this; and if there is anywhere a word that looks another way, the book would be stronger, clearer, and (I had almost said), fuller without it."

"Nothing would be allowed in such a story that did not, at the same time, expedite the progress of the fable, build up the characters, and strike home the moral or the philosophical lesson."

1. A Humble Remonstrance
2. Ibid.
3. A Note on Realism

In order to achieve this unity of structure for which Stevenson pleads, and, incidentally, which he rarely, if ever, attains himself, it stands to reason that the plot must be a perfected design in the novelist's mind before he attempts to transcribe his story on paper. Obviously, there can be no question of his making up the story as he goes along. He must have a definite objective in mind, he must know definitely for what effects he is striving, if he is so to select his series of events that they will all contribute to the general design. Moreover, he must know how his novel is to end before he begins the actual business of writing, for if a book is to end badly, it should convey an atmosphere of impending disaster from its very beginning. And, consistent to his theory that literature should give joy rather than to depress, Stevenson says that unless an author has no other alternative, unless his plot absolutely demands it, he has no justification whatever for affixing an unhappy ending to a story.

"The Little Minister ought to have ended badly; we all know it did; and we are infinitely grateful to you for the grace and good feeling with which you lied about it. If you had told the truth, I, for one, could never have forgiven you. As you had conceived and written the earlier parts, the truth about the end, though indisputably true to fact, would have been a lie, or what is worse, a discord in art. If you are going to make a

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book end badly, it must end badly from the beginning. Now your book began to end well. You let yourself fall in love with, and fondle, and smile at your puppets. Once you had done that your honour was committed--at the cost of truth to life you were bound to save them. It is the blot on Richard Feverel, for instance, that it begins to end well; and then tricks you and ends ill. But in that case there is worse behind, for the ill-ending does not inherently issue from the plot--the story had, in fact, ended well after the great last interview between Richard and Lucy--and the blind, illogical bullet which smashes all has no more to do between the boards than a fly has to do with the room into whose open window it comes buzzing. It might have so happened; it needed not; and unless needs must, we have no right to pain our readers."¹

Stevenson himself had a case of conscience of this sort with his last novel, Weir of Hermiston. He did not live long enough to write more than a third of the book, but the following excerpt from one of his letters tells us that the tragic story was to have had as happy an ending as it could have under the circumstances.

"Braxfield--only his name is Hermiston--has a son who is condemned to death; plainly there is a fine tempting fitness about this; and I meant he was to hang. But now on considering my minor characters, I saw there were five people who would--in a sense who must--break prison and attempt his rescue. They were capable, hardy folks, too, who might very well succeed. Why

1. Letter to J. M. Barrie, 1892

book and badly, it must end badly from the beginning. Now your book began to end well. You let yourself fall in love with, and found, and smile at your puppets. Once you had done that your honour was committed--at the cost of truth to life you were bound to save them. It is the plot on Richard Feverel, for instance, that it begins to end well; and then strikes you and ends ill. But in that case there is worse behind, for the ill-ending does not inherently issue from the plot--the story had, in fact, ended well after the great last interview between Richard and Lucy--and the blind, illogical belief which smashes all has no more to do between the boards than a fly has to do with the room into whose open window it comes buzzing. It might have so happened; it needed not; and unless needs must, we have no right to pain our readers."

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(2) dreams as a should they not then? Why should not young Hermiston escape clear out of the country?"¹

(1) Sub-Plot

Since Stevenson tries so valiantly and so persistently to teach the lesson of simplicity and unity in plot structure, it would be nothing short of nonsense for him to favor the sub-plot as a general rule. He has not much to say on the subject, probably assuming that the reader will realize that unity of structure precludes the use of sub-plots, but his terse advice is to avoid the sub-plot completely, "unless as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue."²

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1. Letter to J. M. Barrie, 1892
 2. A Humble Remonstrance

(2) Dreams as an Aid in Plot Structure

At first glance, it may seem somewhat unnecessary to include in a discussion of narrative technique an account of the effect which dreams may have upon the story-teller. One's first reaction may be that if a man has vivid dreams which sometimes give him ideas for stories, which he can use to good advantage, he is inordinately fortunate, but the whole thing is accident, and not narrative technique. It is not, of course, and Stevenson does not imply that the good story-teller's imagination should be so very active that the business of plot construction should go on even while he is asleep. Obviously, a man can be an excellent narrator and yet never have dreamed once in his life. But it so happens that Stevenson dreamed almost continuously from early childhood, that "the brownies"--those mysteriously active "Little People" who enacted plots on the stage while he dozed in the audience section, so to speak--gave him the plots, or parts of the plots, for some of his best known stories, and that no discussion of his theories of narrative would be quite complete without some reference to the vast assistance which dreams may give in the construction of plots. Stevenson, by the way, is referring to himself in the following passage when he talks

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about the dreamer.

"Who are the Little People? They are near connections of the dreamer's, beyond doubt; they share in his financial worries and have an eye to the bank-book; they share plainly in his training; they have plainly learned like him to build the scheme of a considerate story and to arrange emotion in progressive order; only I think they have more talent; and one thing is beyond doubt, they can tell him a story piece by piece, like a serial, and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim. And for the Little People, what shall I say they are but just my Brownies, God bless them! who do one-half my work while I am fast asleep, and in all human likelihood, do the rest for me as well, when I am wide awake and fondly suppose I do it for myself. That part which is done while I am sleeping is the Brownies' part beyond contention; but that which is done when I am up and about is by no means necessarily mine, since all goes to show the Brownies have a hand in it even then. Here is a doubt that much concerns my conscience. For myself--what I call I, my conscious ego--I am sometimes tempted to suppose I am no story-teller at all, but a creature as matter of fact as any cheese-monger or any cheese, and a realist bemired up to the ears in actuality; so that, by that account, the whole of my published fiction should be the single-handed product of some Brownie, some Familiar, some unseen collaborator, whom I keep locked up in a back garret, while I get all the praise and he but a share (which I cannot prevent him from getting) of the pudding. I am an excellent adviser, something like Moliere's servant; I pull back and I cut down; and I dress the whole in the best words and sentences that I can find and make; I hold the pen, too; and I do the sitting at the table, which is about the worst of it; and when

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"Who are the Little People? They are near connections of the dreamer's, beyond doubt; they share in his financial worries and have an eye to the bank-book; they share plainly in his training; they have plainly learned like him to build the scheme of a considerable story and to arrange emotion in progressive order; only I think they have more talent; and one thing is beyond doubt, they can tell him a story piece by piece, like a serial, and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim. . . . And for the Little People, what shall I say they are but just my Brownies, God bless them! who do one-half my work while I am fast asleep, and in all human likelihood, do the rest for me as well, when I am wide awake and fondly suppose I do it for myself. That part which is gone while I am sleeping is the Brownies' part beyond contention; but that which is done when I am up and about is by no means necessarily mine, since all goes to show the Brownies have a hand in it even then. Here is a doubt that much concerns my conscience--for myself--what I call I, my conscious ego--I am sometimes tempted to suppose I am no story-teller at all, but a creature as matter of fact as any cheese-monger or any chess, and a realist bent up to the ears in actuality; so that, by that account, the whole of my published fiction should be the single-handed product of some Brownie, some familiar, some unseen collaborator, whom I keep locked up in a back garret, while I get all the praise and he but a share (which I cannot prevent him from getting) of the pudding. I am an excellent adviser, something like Morpheus's servant; I pull back and I cut down; and I dress the whole in the best words and sentences that I can find and make; I hold the pen, too; and I do the sitting at the table, which is about the worst of it; and when

all is done, I make up the manuscript and pay for the registration; so that, on the whole, I have some claim to share, though not so largely as I do, in the profits of our common enterprise."¹

These silent partners of Stevenson and Company--or, to leave all the whimsy to Stevenson, his subconscious powers--work out whole plots for him, plots which are undeniably good and ingenious. Speaking of such a story which he has never used because it contains certain "unmarketable elements," he says somewhat ruefully,

"But my wonder has still kept growing; and I think the reader's will also, if he consider it ripely. For now he sees why I speak of the Little People as of substantive inventors and performers. To the end they had kept their secret. I had no guess whatever at the motive of the woman--the hinge of the whole well-invented plot--until the instant of that highly dramatic declaration. It was not my tale; it was the Little People's! But observe: not only was the secret kept, the story was told with really guileful craftsmanship. The conduct of both actors is (in the cant phrase) psychologically correct, and the emotion aptly graduated up to the surprising climax. I am awake now, and I know this trade; and yet I cannot better it. I am awake, and I live by this business; and yet I could not outdo--could not even equal--that crafty artifice by which the same situation is twice presented and the two actors twice brought face to face over the evidence, only once it is in her hand, once in his--and these in their due order, the least dramatic first."²

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1. A Chapter on Dreams
 2. Ibid.

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"But my wonder has still kept growing; and I think the reader will also, if he consider it ripe. For now he sees why I speak of the Little People as of sub-atomic inventors and performers. To the end they had kept their secret. I had no guess whatever as to the motive of the woman--the hinge of the whole well-invented plot--until the instant of that highly dramatic declaration. It was not my tale; it was the Little People's!....But observe: not only was the secret kept, the story was told with really brilliant craftsmanship. The conduct of both actors is (in the best phrase) psychologically correct, and the emotion aptly graduated up to the surprising climax. I am awake now, and I know this trade; and yet I cannot better it. I am awake, and I live by this business; and yet I could not outdo--could not even equal--that story artifice by which the same situation is twice presented and the two actors twice brought face to face over the evidence, only once it is in her hand, once in his--and these in their due order, the least dramatic first."

Stevenson has given an interesting account of himself and his collaborators at work on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He had long been trying to write a story based on this subject of man's dual personality, he says, when he was suddenly faced by a desperate need of ready cash.

"For two days I went about racking my brains for a plot of any sort; and on the second night I dreamed the scene at the window, and a scene afterward split in two, in which Hyde, pursued for some crime, took the powder and underwent the change in the presence of his pursuers. All the rest was made awake, and consciously, although I think I can trace in much of it the manner of my Brownies. The meaning of the tale is therefore mine, and had long pre-existed in my garden of Adonis, and tried one body after another in vain; indeed, I do most of the morality, worse luck! and my Brownies have not a rudiment of what we call a conscience. Mine, too, is the setting, mine the characters. All that was given me was the matter of three scenes, and the central idea of a voluntary change becoming involuntary.....For the business of the powders, which so many have censured, is, I am relieved to say, not mine at all but the Brownies.'"1

These same Brownies deserve the lion's share of the credit for Olalla, that "not very defensible story," as Stevenson calls it.

"Here the court, the mother, the mother's niche, Olalla, Olalla's chamber, the meetings on the stair, the broken window, the ugly scene of the bite, were all given me in bulk and detail as I have tried to write them; to this I added only the external scenery (for in my dream I never was beyond the court), the portrait, the characters of Felipe and the priest, the moral, such as it is, and the last pages, such as, alas! they are. And I may even say that in this particular case

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b. Character

the moral itself was given me; for it arose immediately on a comparison of the mother and the daughter, and from the hideous trick of atavism in the first. Sometimes a parabolic sense is still more undeniably present in a dream; sometimes I cannot but suppose my Brownies have been aping Bunyan, and yet in no case with what would possibly be called a moral in a tract; never with the ethical narrowness; conveying hints instead of life's larger limitations and that sort of sense which we seem to perceive in the arabesque of time and space.....For the most part, it will be seen, my Brownies are somewhat fantastic, like their stories hot and hot, full of passion and the picturesque, alive with animating incident; and they have no prejudice against the supernatural."¹

"To make a character at all--so to select, so to describe a few acts, a few speeches, perhaps (though this is quite superfluous) a few details of physical appearance, so that these shall all cohere and strike in the reader's mind a common note of personality--there is no more delicate enterprise, nowhere less comprehensible than here. We meet a man, we find his talk to have been racy; and yet so every word were taken down by shorthand, we should stand amazed at its essential insignificance. Physical presence, the speaking eye, the inevitable commentary of the voice, it was in these the spell resided; and these are all excluded from the pages of the novel."²

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b. Character

"For so long a time your puppets are to be always vital, always consistent, always vigorous!"¹

The writer of novels of adventure will encounter no great difficulty in the creation and delineation of characters since the only necessary function of the actors in such tales is to circumstantiate the action. Such characters, it will be remembered, need but one set of traits--"the formidable and the warlike," and if they but arouse a feeling of fear and danger in the reader they are adequately drawn. Unfortunately, however, the novelist does not always have such plain sailing. The creation of characters in other types of novels is a challenge to the author's ingenuity and skill. Stevenson, at any rate, regards the task as a difficult one.

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1. My First Book, prefixed to Treasure Island
 2. Some Gentlemen in Fiction

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"To make a character at all--so to select, so to describe a few notes, a few speeches, perhaps (though this is quite superficial) a few details of physical appearance, so that these shall all cohere and strike in the reader's mind a common note of personality--there is no more delicate enterprise, because it involves less comprehensible than here. We meet a man, we find his talk to have been true; and yet in every word were taken down by shorthand, we should stand amazed at the essential insignificance. Physical presence, the speaking eye, the inimitable commentary of the voice, it was in these the skill resided; and these are all excluded from the pages of the novel."

One feels tempted to take exception with him when he says that it is quite superfluous to include details of physical appearance. Surely, if the author tells us something of a character's physical characteristics, the mere telling does not detract from the excellence of the characterization; on the other hand, if we have something tangible to associate with a character, the chances are that such a character will be more easily visualized, seem more real, and stand out more clearly in our mind. It seems a case of nothing to lose and something to be gained. However, as Stevenson points out, the only clue which Shakespeare gives us of Hamlet's bodily appearance is the untrue reference to his being fat; and yet, he says, in spite of the fact that we do not really know what Hamlet looks like, he is a man "solid to the touch, a man to praise, to blame, to pity, ay, and to love." Evidently, there is no argument there. Perhaps the only answer is that Shakespeares who can achieve vivid characterizations merely through speech and action are relatively scarce, though it must be admitted that Stevenson himself was particularly gifted in this respect.

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in the delineation of character were contrary to his usual technique. As a general rule, his descriptions of his characters are dynamic or kinetic rather than static, and deal rather with how a character did or said something than with what he was like. His method of characterization is objective and concrete rather than expository. As an example of his unsurpassable art in characterization through action only, without comments of any sort, Clayton Meeker Hamilton aptly suggests the scene in *The Master of Ballantrae* wherein the two brothers, who hate each other, fall into a dispute over a game of cards which culminates in the duel. Speaking of this scene, Hamilton says with justice,

"It is not necessary for Stevenson to tell us that, whereas Mr. Henry is phlegmatic and deliberate, the Master is impulsive and mercurial. It is not necessary for him to attempt analysis of the emotions and thoughts of the leading characters, since these are sufficiently evident from what they do and say. The action happens to the eye and ear, without the interpretation of an analytic intellect; but the reader is made actually present at the scene, and can see and judge it for himself."¹

Stevenson once said that one of Barrie's characters affected him as a lie, and he explains this impression of falseness by saying that the character in question was probably drawn from a person whom Barrie actually knew. This

1. Hamilton, Materials and Methods of Fiction, p. 92

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method of basing story-book figures on real acquaintances and friends is very apt to be misleading, he thinks, since the actual is not necessarily always artistically true. In spite of the pitfalls which the method entails, however, he says that it is perhaps the best way of "making character," and uses it himself to a great extent, as Mrs. Stevenson points out in her numerous prefaces.

"Whenever my husband wished to depict a romantic, erratic, engaging character, he delved into the rich mine of his cousin's personality. Robert Alan served, not only for the young man with the cream tarts, but as Paul Somerset in The Dynamiter and appeared in certain phases of Prince Otto."1

"Barbara Grant in David Balfour was drawn from his remembrance of the beautiful and witty Mrs. Ferrier, daughter of Christopher North."2

In thus basing his imaginary characters on real people, Stevenson did not attempt to achieve photographic reproductions. His aim was not necessarily to show these people exactly as they were in life. They merely gave him the germ of an idea, and he worked on from there. His technique was to prune away the superficial qualities of his subject, and, after having reached the fundamental traits, or trait, of his nature, to start building up the fictitious character on that base.

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1. Mrs. Stevenson, Preface of New Arabian Nights
 2. Mrs. Stevenson, Preface of David Balfour

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A passage referring to the creation of John Silver in Treasure Island shows us how he worked in this particular instance.

"And then I had an idea for John Silver from which I promised myself funds of entertainment; to take an admired friend of mine, to deprive him of all his finer qualities and higher graces of temperament, to leave him with nothing but his strength, his courage, his quickness, and his magnificent geniality, and to try to express these in terms of the culture of a raw tarpaulin. Such psychical surgery is, I think, a common way of 'making character'; perhaps it is, indeed, the only way. We can put in the quaint figure that spoke a hundred words with us yesterday by the wayside; but do we know him? Our friend, with his infinite variety and flexibility, we know--but can we put him in? Upon the first, we must engraft secondary and imaginary qualities, possible all wrong; from the second, knife in hand, we must cut away and deduct the needless arborescence of his nature, but the trunk and the few branches that remain we may at least be fairly sure of."¹

Stevenson believes that the novelist, in order to offer a convincing characterization, must feel a momentary sympathy for every character which he portrays. If he deals with a blackguard, for instance, he should be able to view the world from the villain's particular point of view for the moment, and with not too disapproving and disdainful an eye.

"Your descriptions of your dealings with Lord Rintoul are frightfully unconscientious. You should never write about anybody until you persuade yourself at least for the moment that you love him, above all anybody on whom your plot revolves. It will always make a hole in the book; and if he has any-

1. My First Book: 'Treasure Island'

thing to do with the mechanism, prove a stick in your machinery."¹

Thus does Stevenson lay down the law to Barrie, but, judged by this standard, his own dealings with the four characters of *The Ebb-Tide* are "frightfully unconscientious" too, and his "machinery" must be clogged with innumerable sticks, since the four characters are practically the only ones in the book. Speaking of them he says,

"There are only four characters, but they are such a troop of swine! Their behavior is so deeply beneath any possible standard, that on a retrospect I wonder I have been able to endure them myself until the yarn was finished."²

Because characters in a book, in the final analysis, consist of nothing but words, Stevenson considers the speech attributed to them double important. He thinks that it is easy enough to tag a character by his speech, as Dickens liked to do, but, in his opinion, the true masterpieces, which impress and convince by their reality, are just those characters which have no striking or outstanding peculiarities of speech.

"It is just when the obvious expedient of the barrel-organ vocabulary, the droll mispronunciation or the racy dialect, are laid aside, that the true masterpieces are wrought (it would seem) from nothing. Hamlet speaks in character, I potently believe it, and yet see not how. He speaks at least as no man ever spoke in life, and very much as

1. Letter to J. M. Barrie, 1892
2. Letter to Henry James, 1893

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many other heroes do in the same volume; now uttering the noblest verse, now prose of the most cunning workmanship; clothing his opinions throughout in that amazing dialect, Shakespearese. The opinions themselves, again, though they are true and forcible and reinforced with excellent images, are not peculiar either to Hamlet, or to any man or class or period; in their admirable generality of appeal resides their merit; they might figure, and they would be applauded, in almost any play and in the mouth of almost any noble and considerate character."¹

An author may tell us this or that about his characters, but the mere enumeration of qualities or virtues does not convince us in the least. The characters themselves are the only ones who can convince us that the charming things that have been said about them are true, and since they can accomplish this only through their speech, they should always think and talk naturally, as befits the role they have been assigned to play. If they do perchance step out of that role, if only for a moment, the reader is quick to notice the discrepancy, and a moment is more than enough to shatter completely the illusion laboriously built up by the author. Scott, whom Stevenson considers extraordinarily capable in the portrayal of character parts, falls short in the presentation of ordinary characters for the simple reason that he does not take the trouble to make his people talk consistently.

1. Some Gentlemen in Fiction

"The trite, obliterated features of too many of his heroes have already wearied two generations of readers. At times his characters will speak with something far beyond propriety with a true heroic note; but on the next page they will be wading wearily forward with an ungrammatical and undramatic rigmarole of words."¹

"Readers cannot fail to have remarked that what an author tells us of the beauty or the charm of his puppets goes for nought; that we know instantly better; that the heroine cannot open her mouth but what, all in a moment the fine phrases of preparation fall from round her like the robes from Cinderella, and she stands before us, self-betrayed, as a poor, ugly, sickly wench, or perhaps a strapping market-woman. Authors, at least, know it well; a heroine will too often start the trick of 'getting ugly;' and no disease is more difficult to cure."²

Not only will a heroine "get ugly" on occasion, but it can so happen that all the characters in a book, miraculously endowed with a will of their own so it seems, will defy their creator, stage a strike against fulfilling the destiny assigned to them by him, and practically write the book themselves. Stevenson tells of one such instance when his characters rebelled.

"In one of my books, and in one only, the characters took the bit in their teeth; all at once, they became detached from the flat paper, they turned their backs on me and walked off bodily; and from that time my task was stenographic--it was they who spoke, it was they who wrote the remainder of the story."³

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1. A Gossip on Romance
 2. A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's
 3. Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 2, p. 19

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Not only will a heroine "get ugly" on occasion, but it can so happen that all the characters in a book, without exception, will do so. Their creator, stage a strike against the destiny assigned to them by him, and practically write the book themselves. Stevenson tells of one such instance when his characters rebelled.

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3. Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 2, p. 12

In one of his letters, Stevenson begs Henry James to write a novel in which the characters will be cast in "a mold a little more abstract and academic," and while commenting on Dostoyefsky's Le Crime et le Châtiment, he remarks that James did not like the book because the character of Raskolnikoff was not objective. "And at that," he adds,

"I divined a great gulf between us, and, on further reflection, the existence of a certain impotence in many minds of to-day, which prevents them from living, in a book or a character, and keeps them standing afar off, spectators of a puppet show. To such I suppose the book may seem empty in the centre; to the others it is a room, a house of life, into which they themselves enter, and are tortured and purified."¹

Stevenson's aim in creating characters was to make them vital, spirited, consistent, and, above all, possible. Speaking of Shakespeare's Richard III and of his own characterization of Richard in The Black Arrow, he says,

"I had indeed one moment of pride about my poor Black Arrow; Dickon Crookback I did, and I do, think is a spirited and possible figure. Shakespeare's--O, if we can call that cocoon Shakespeare!--Shakespeare's is spirited--one likes to see the untaught athlete butting against the adamantine ramparts of human nature, head down, breach up; it reminds us how trivial we are to-day, and what safety resides in our triviality. For spirited it may be, but O, sure not possible. I love Dumas and I love Shakespeare: you will not mistake me if I say that the Richard

1. Letter to J. A. Symonds, 1886

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of the one reminds me of the Porthos of the other; and if by any sacrifice of my own literary baggage I could clear the Vicomte de Bragelonne of Porthos, Jekyll might go, and The Master, and The Black Arrow, you may be sure, and I should think my life not lost for mankind if half a dozen more of my volumes must be thrown in."¹

Also, his spirited defense of his seamen in the novel, Treasure Island, in reply to criticism of the book's seamanship which had been relayed to him through W. E. Henley, gives us an idea of what he looks for in character.

"As for my seamen, did Runciman ever know eighteenth-century Buccaneers? No. Well, no more did I. But I have known and sailed with seamen too, and lived and eaten with them; and I made my put-up shot in no great ignorance, but as a put-up thing has to be made, i. e. to be coherent and picturesque, and damn the expense. Are they fairly lively on the wires? Then, favour me with your tongues. Are they wooden, and dim, and no sport? Then it is I that am silent, otherwise not."²

Stevenson is of the opinion that most male novelists cannot portray young women convincingly, and that most women novelists absolutely cannot hide the fact that their male characters are the creations of a woman's brain. Referring to the utter lack of life in Raeburn's portraits of young women, he says,

"In all these pretty faces, you miss character, you miss that spice of the devil which is worth all the prettiness in the world; and what is worst of all, you miss sex.

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1. Letter to Marcel Schwob, 1890
 2. Letter to W. E. Henley, 1883

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His young ladies are not womanly to nearly the same degree as his men are masculine; they are so in a negative sense; in short, they are the typical young ladies of the male novelist.....Even women, who understand men so well for practical purposes, do not know them well enough for the purposes of art. Take even the very best of their male creations, take Tito Melema, for instance, and you will find he has an equivocal air, and every now and again remembers he has a comb at the back of his head. Of course, no woman will believe this, and many men will be so very polite as to humour their incredulity."¹

He himself felt for a long time that it was entirely beyond his powers to portray women adequately. He writes in 1890--four years before his death--that he has never pleased himself with any women of his save two minor character parts, the Countess of Rosen in Prince Otto, and Madame Desprez in The Treasure of Franchard. This belief of his that he was incapable of drawing women was more than belied in his characterization of the elder Kirstie in Weir of Hermiston, however, and his powers so increased in that particular respect that at the time of his death he was planning, with perfect self-confidence, a novel in which all of the important characters were to be women. In one of her prefaces, Mrs. Stevenson quotes him thus,

"There was a time when I didn't dare to really draw a woman; but I have no fear now. I shall show a little of what I can do with the two Kirsties; but in Sophia Scarlet the main interest shall be centred in the women."²

1. Some Portraits by Raeburn
2. Preface of St. Ives

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Much has been said concerning Stevenson's tendency to exclude women from his books. To mention but three of his novels at random, Kidnaped, Treasure Island, and The Ebb-Tide can be said to contain no women at all, and of course, many conjectures have been made as to the reason for this. The most popular explanation seems to be that Stevenson had the small boy's attitude that women always spoil all the fun, and so naturally he excluded them from his adventures. William Lyon Phelps imagines that "the best reason for Stevenson's reserve on matters of sex was probably his delicacy; he did not wish to represent this particular animal impulse with the same vivid reality he pictured avarice, ambition, courage, cowardice, and pride; and thus hampered by conscience, he thought it best in the main to omit it altogether."¹ And this explanation seems to come closest to the mark when we examine two statements which Stevenson himself made on the subject.

"I am afraid my touch is a little broad in a love story; I can't mean one thing and write another. As for women, I am no more in any fear of them; I can do a sort all right; age makes me less afraid of a petticoat, but I am a little in fear of grossness. However, this David Balfour's love affair, that's all right--might be read out to a mother's meeting--or a daughter's meeting. The difficulty in a love yarn, which dwells at all on love, is the dwelling on one string; it is manifold, I grant, but the root fact is there unchanged, and the sentiment

1. Phelps, Robert Louis Stevenson

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being very intense, and already very much handled in letters, positively calls for a little pawing and gracing. With a writer of my prosaic literalness and pertinency of point of view, this all shoves toward grossness--positively even toward the far more damnable closeness. This has kept me off the sentiment hitherto, and now I am to try: Lord! Of course Meredith can do it, and so could Shakespeare; but with all my romance, I am a realist and a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly and expressly rendered; hence my perils. To do love in the same spirit as I did (for instance) D. Balfour's fatigue in the heather; my dear sir, there were grossness--ready made! And hence, how to sugar?"¹

"This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world; I usually get out of it by not having any women in it at all."²

In one of his essays, Stevenson presents a conundrum which is nothing short of intriguing. The puzzle is, can a novelist draw gentlemen because he is one himself? And if he cannot, is it because he is not one? If we conclude that Hamlet, who is ever a gentleman except in the great scene with his mother, is a gentleman because Shakespeare was one, Stevenson says, why is it then that Fielding, undeniably a gentleman, could not touch Richardson, indubitably not a gentleman in representing what the one was and the other was not? Gentlemen seem to come from Thackeray's pen apparently without effort, although Stevenson scarcely considers him the ideal

1. Vailima Letters
2. Ibid.

gentleman, saying of him that "if there were nothing else, perpetual nosing after snobbery at least suggests the snob."¹ Dickens, on the other hand, at whose call all sorts of characters offered their services, labored for years in a vain attempt to create a gentleman, Stevenson thinks, and succeeded finally--but only partially--with Wrayburn, Carton, and Twemlow. And having progressed this far, Stevenson increases his mental headache by wondering whether Dickens failed so often because he was not a gentleman, or whether he finally succeeded because he was one. Either decision obviously leads to new troubles. If Dickens was a gentleman, why did he ever fail? And if he was not, how did he ever succeed? At this point, Stevenson feels inclined to close his discussion by offering a substantial reward for a solution to the puzzle, and one can hardly blame him. However, bravely resisting the temptation of an easy way out, he continues, giving what he calls his "inconclusive argument" which seems conclusive enough to have entitled him to the reward, had it been offered.

"If we look only at Carton and Wrayburn, it must strike us at once that both are most ambitiously attempted; that Dickens was not content to draw a hero and a gentleman plainly and quietly; that, after all his ill-success, he must still handicap himself upon these fresh adventures, and make Carton a sot, and sometimes a cantankerous sot, and Wrayburn insolent to the verge, and sometimes beyond the verge, of what is pardonable. A moment's thought will show us

1. Some Gentlemen in Fiction

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"If we look only at Garon and Wrayburn, it must strike us at once that both are most radically attempted; that Dickens was not content to draw a hero and a gentleman plainly and quietly; that, after all his ill-success, he must still handicap himself upon these fresh adventures, and make Garon a sot, and sometimes a cantankerous sot, and Wrayburn insolent to the verge, and sometimes beyond the verge, of what is pardonable. A moment's thought will show us

2. Settling

this was in the nature of his genius, and a part of his literary method. His fierce intensity of design was not to be slaked with any academic portraiture; not all the arts of individualisation could perfectly content him; he must still seek something more definite and more express than nature. All artists, it may be properly argued, do the like; it is their method to discard the middling and the insignificant, to disengage the charactered and the precise. But it is only a class of artists that pursue so singly the note of personality; and is it not possible that such a preoccupation may disable men from representing gentlefolk? The gentleman passes in the stream of the day's manners, inconspicuous. The lover of the individual may find him scarce worth the drawing. And even if he draw him, on what will his attention centre but just upon those points in which his model exceeds or falls short of his subdued ideal--but just upon those points in which the gentleman is not genteel?"¹

Treasure Island also is proof that settling can be the motivating factor even in a tale of adventure in that its whole plot was conceived from a purely imaginary map which Stevenson had drawn to amuse his young step-son.

"On one of these occasions, I made the map of an island; it was

1. Some Gentlemen in Fiction *John Galsworthy, Vol. 2, p. 41*

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c. Setting

Stevenson thinks that the setting can be the initial element in a story. He says that the story-teller, starting only with a sense or feeling of setting, can create a story by imagining the other two necessary elements of narrative--character and action. A conversation of his on this point has been often repeated, and is quoted by his biographer, Graham Balfour.

"Either on that day or about that time I remember very distinctly Stevenson's saying to me: 'There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly--you must bear with me while I try to make this clear'--(here he made a gesture with his hand as if he were trying to shape something and give it outline and form)--'you may take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express it and realize it. I'll give you an example--The Merry Men. There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which the coast affected me.'"1

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elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined I ticketed my performance Treasure Island. I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads, and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down dale, the mills and the ruins, the ponds and the ferries, perhaps the Standing Stone or the Druidic Circle on the heath; here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or twopenceworth of imagination to understand with! No child but must remember laying his head in the grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Somewhat in this way, as I paused upon my map of Treasure Island, the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. But the adventures of Treasure Island are not yet quite at an end. I had written it up to the map. The map was the chief part of my plot. For instance, I had called an islet Skeleton Island, not knowing what I meant, seeking only for the immediate picturesque, and it was to justify this name that I broke into the gallery of Mr. Poe and stole Flint's pointer. And in the same way, it was because I had made two harbours that the *Hispaniola* was sent on her wanderings with Israel Hands."1

The way in which the setting may suggest action is thus discoursed upon by Stevenson in one of his essays.

1. My First Book: 'Treasure Island'

elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined I tickled my performance Treasure Island. I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the compass of the roads, and rivers, the picturesque footpaths of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down dale, the mills and the ruins, the ponds and the terraces, perhaps the Standing Stone or the Druidic Circle on the heath; here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or two-penceworth of imagination to understand with! No child but must remember laying his head in the grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Somewhat in this way, as I glanced upon my map of Treasure Island, the future characters of the book began to appear there vividly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. But the adventures of Treasure Island are not yet quite at an end. I had written it up to the map. The map was the chief part of my plot. For instance, I had called an island Skeleton Island, not knowing what I meant, seeking only for the immediate picturesque, and it was to justify this name that I broke into the gallery of Mr. Poe and stole Flint's pointer. And in the same way, it was because I had made two harbours that the Hispaniola was sent on her wanderings with Israel Hands."

The way in which the setting may suggest action is thus discussed upon by Stevenson in one of his essays.

"One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant harbour puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck!"¹

The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry and the Inn at Burford have always seemed to him the ideal setting for exciting and romantic adventures. He is positive that something deeply thrilling must have taken place there, or that it will surely take place at some future time.

"I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man of the hour had not yet come; but some day,

"One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbor puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the deep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. It is thus that traces of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly for me, and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate names for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dark gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck."

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I think, a boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, Fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford."¹

There is, or there should be, a definite, appropriate relation between actions and the setting in which they occur, he says, and the author who has the knack of making the right sort of thing happen in the right surroundings renders his action doubly significant, to say nothing of the fact that he makes it all the more vivid and forcible.

"An event strikes root and grows into a legend, when it has happened among congenial surroundings. Ugly actions, above all in ugly places, have the true romantic quality, and become an undying property of their scene. To a man like Scott, the different appearances of nature seemed each to contain its own legend ready made, which it was his to call forth; in such or such a place, only such or such events ought with propriety to happen; and in this spirit he made The Lady of the Lake for Ben Venue, The Heart of Midlothian for Edinburgh, and The Pirate, so indifferently written but so romantically conceived, for the desolate islands and roaring tideways of the North."²

Stevenson thinks that the background and the spirit of the times can, and should, count for a great deal in a novel. As an example of a novelist who was completely engrossed in a world of purely human interest and who was

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 2. Edinburgh

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content to use the landscape and the forces of nature to no more effect than a playwright indicating stage directions, he cites Fielding. Tom Jones takes place during the rebellion, as he says, and yet Fielding, characteristically, makes use of this colossal upheaval merely to make a troop of soldiers casually cross his hero's path.

"Fielding tells us as much as he thought necessary to account for the actions of his creatures. The larger motives are all unknown to him: he had not understood that the nature of the landscape or the spirit of the times could be for anything in a story; and so, naturally and rightly, he said nothing about them. Already in Scott we begin to have a sense of the subtle influences that moderate and qualify a man's personality; that personality is no longer thrown out in unnatural isolation, but is resumed into its place in the constitution of things."¹

There is a great difference between Fielding and Scott in their treatment of the background and natural forces as elements in the novel, he thinks, but there is a veritable gulf between Scott's relatively timid beginnings and Victor Hugo's masterful use of nature and the natural elements as an important and integral part of the narrative.

"Those elements that only began to show themselves, as adjuncts, in the novels of Walter Scott, have usurped ever more and more of the canvas; until we find the whole interest of one of Hugo's romances centering around matter that Fielding would have banished from his

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altogether, as being out of the field of fiction. So we have elemental forces occupying nearly as large a place, playing (so to speak) nearly as important a rule, as the man, Gilliat, who opposes and overcomes them. Hence, those individual interests that were supreme in Fielding, and even in Scott, stood out over everything else and formed as it were the spine of the story, figure here only as one set of interests among many sets, one force among many forces, one thing to be treated out of a whole world of things equally vivid and important. So that, for Hugo, man is no longer an isolated spirit without antecedent or relation here below, but a being involved in the action and reaction of natural forces, himself a centre of such action and reaction; or an unit in a great multitude, chased hither and thither by epidemic terrors and aspirations, and in all seriousness, blown about by every wind of doctrine."¹

In one of his essays, Stevenson remarks, "No human being ever spoke of scenery for above two minutes at a time, which makes me suspect we hear too much of it in literature."² Elsewhere he says that, in his opinion, no writer has yet done justice to rain. His own use of the weather in emotional harmony or in emotional contrast with his characters has been justly praised, and as Hamilton says with reason,

"Perhaps in no other detail of craftsmanship does Robert Louis Stevenson so clearly prove his mastery as in his marshalling of the weather, always vividly and truthfully described to serve a purpose always fitting to his fictions."³

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According to Stevenson's theory of narrative technique, the novelist should not be hazy and haphazard concerning the topographical characteristics of the locale of his story. He should know the countryside, whether it is real or imaginary, which is the setting of his tale, practically as well as if he had lived there all his life. He should be painstakingly exact in all the distances which he mentions, and there should be no doubt in the reader's mind concerning his knowledge of the points of the compass. To make sure of these important facts, and thus to avoid unnecessary errors, the writer should have recourse to two things--a map and an almanac; and Stevenson's advice is never to attempt to write any sort of story without having consulted the two very thoroughly.

"With an almanack, and the map of the country, and the plan of every house, whether actually plotted on paper or already and immediately apprehended in the mind, a man may hope to avoid some of the grossest possible blunders. With the map before him, he will scarce allow the sun to set in the east, as it does in The Antiquary. And it is certainly well, though far from necessary, to avoid such 'croppers.' But it is my contention--my superstition, if you like--that who is faithful to his map, and consults it, and draws from it his inspiration, daily and hourly, gains positive support, and not mere negative immunity from accident. The tale has a root there; it grows in that soil; it has a spine of its own behind the words. Better if the country be real, and he has walked

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d. Point of View in Narrative

every foot of it and knows every milestone. But even with imaginary places, he will do well in the beginning to provide a map; as he studies it, relations will appear that he had not thought upon; he will discover obvious, though unsuspected, short-cuts and footprints for his messengers; and even when a map is not all the plot, as it was in Treasure Island, it will be found to be a mine of suggestion."¹

As one can judge from the two quotations above, Stevenson has a decided preference for stories told by the leading actor in the series of events, or, as in The Master of Ballantrae, by a more or less passive spectator whose only role is to look on and to narrate. To mention but a few of his books at random, Kidnapped, Treasure Island, The Master of Ballantrae, and The Wrecker are all written in the first person; three quarters of the short story, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, is narrated in the third person, but the horror of the last two chapters is intensified by a shift to an internal point of view, the next to the last chapter being written by Dr. Lanyon, and the last by Dr. Jekyll himself.

This tendency of Stevenson's to write stories in the first person has caused much comment. My guess, apart from the fact that Stevenson found this method better suited to his talents, would be that he used this technique because he thought that it made for greater vividness, and, I have a

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"Yes, honestly, fiction is very difficult; it is a terrible strain to carry your characters all that time. And the difficulty of according the narrative and the dialogue (in a work of the third person) is extreme. That is one reason out of half a dozen why I so often prefer the first."¹

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suspicion, because it enabled him to participate in the adventures in his own person to a greater degree than if he had presented his narratives in the third person. Swinnerton, the declared enemy of all things Stevensonian, looks on Stevenson's liking for first person tales as evidence of his inability to focus the whole picture. To my mind, the unity of a story is not seriously endangered by the fact that it is written in the first person except that, since the narrator cannot always be in all the places where the various events of the chain take place, the novelist must sometimes have recourse to a change of narrators, and this expedient may, to a certain extent, tend to destroy the impression of unity in the reader's mind. But, as I see it, the greatest drawback, at least as far as Stevenson is concerned, is to reconcile the unassuming Mackellar in The Master of Ballantrae, and the youthful, uneducated David in Kidnaped with Stevenson's highly polished narrative style. At any rate, it seems significant that in his last unfinished novel, Weir of Hermiston, which all critics agree is the best work he ever did, and work of a very high order, Stevenson presented his narrative in the third person.

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e. Description

"Your jubilation over Catriona did me good, and still more the subtlety and truth of your remark on the starving of the visual sense in that book. 'Tis true, and unless I make the greater effort--and am as a step to that, convinced of its necessity--it will be more true, I fear, in the future. I hear people talking, and I feel them acting, and that seems to me to be fiction. My two aims may be described as--

1st. War to the adjective.

2nd. Death to the optic nerve.

Admitted we live in an age of the optic nerve in literature. For how many centuries did Literature get along without a sign of it? However, I'll consider your letter."1

"The first start of a novel is hard; it is hard to avoid a little tedium here, but I think by beginning with the arrival of the three Miss Scarlets hot from school and society in England, I may manage to slide in the information. The problem is exactly a Balzac one, and I wish I had his fist--for I have already a better method--the kinetic, whereas he continually allowed himself to be led into the static."2

"My theory is that literature must always be most at home in treating movement and change; hence I look for them."3

Since the aim of description is necessarily static, and since Stevenson obviously sees literature in terms of

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2. Valium Letters

movement, one would not expect him to sanction the use of description for its own sake, and he does not, speaking scornfully of "word painters." However, description, and even profuse description, is not only permissible but desirable provided that it is effective.

"Old Paris lives for us with newness of life: we have ever before our eyes the city cut into three by the two arms of the river, the boat shaped island 'moored' by five bridges to the different shores, and the two unequal towns on either hand. We forget all that enumeration of palaces and churches and convents which occupies so many pages of admirable description, and the thoughtless reader might be inclined to conclude from this, that they were pages thrown away; but this is not so: we forget, indeed, the details, as we forget or do not see the different layers of paint on a completed picture; but the thing desired has been accomplished, and we carry away with us a sense of the 'Gothic profile' of the city, of the 'surprising forest of pinnacles and towers and belfries', and we know not what of rich and intricate and quaint."¹

1. Victor Hugo's Romances

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2. The Short Story

Even though the short story differs from the novel in scope and method, the two distinct forms yet contain the same elements of character, action, and setting, so that all that has been said concerning the novel applies with even greater pertinence to the short story. If Stevenson pleads for excision and condensation in the novel, which is a loose rambling form at best, it is evident that he will advocate even greater condensation in the short story; if he pleads for simplicity and unity of structure in the novel, it stands to reason that the short story, whose purpose is to produce "a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis,"¹ must be constructed with the greatest of care in order to produce this unity of impression. If the novelist should have the whole gist of his story well in mind before he starts writing in order to be able to create an atmosphere foreshadowing the ending, in order to be able to maintain the story consistently in the same key, and to be able to make his events lead gradually and inevitably to the particular ending, happy or unhappy, which he has in mind, again it stands to reason that all this is even more true of the short story writer. Even less than the novelist should he include, for their own sake, effects which have no telling importance in the structure of

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"Make another end to it? Ah, yes, but that's not the way I write; the whole tale is implied; I never use an effect when I can help it, unless it prepares the effects which are to follow; that's what a story consists in. To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong. The denouement of a long story is nothing; it is just a 'full close', which you may approach and accompany as you please--it is a coda, not an essential member in the rhythm; but the body and end of a short story is bone of the bone and blood of the beginning."¹

It is necessary to add but two statements which Stevenson made on different occasions. In the first one, he says that any story will ring true provided that the author, after he has chosen the method, style, and the tone of dialogue which he will use, adheres to them religiously and consistently throughout the story.

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It is necessary to add but two statements which Stevenson made on different occasions. In the first one, he says that any story will ring true provided that the author, after he has chosen the method, style, and the tone of dialogue which he will use, adheres to them religiously and consistently throughout the story.

"If you like to touch on Otto, any day in a by-hour, you may tell your students that it is a strange example of

3. Other Narrative the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism: that the unpleasant giddy-mindedness, which spoils the book and often gives it a wanton air of unreality and juggling with air-bells, comes from unsteadiness of key: from the too great realism of some chapters and passages which disprepares the imagination for the cast of the remainder. Any story can be made true in its own key: any story can be made false by the choice of a wrong key of detail or style: Otto is made to reel like a drunken--I was going to say man, but let us substitute cipher--by the variations of the key."¹

In the following quotation, however, we find Stevenson admitting that in the last analysis, he is unable to discover what makes one particular story ring true, while another, written with greater care, persists in sounding false.

"The trouble with Olalla is, that it somehow sounds false. The odd problem is: What makes a story true? Markheim is true; Olalla false; and I don't know why, nor did I feel it while I worked at them; indeed I had more inspiration with Olalla, as the style shows. And that again brings back (almost with the voice of despair) my unanswerable: Why is it false?"²

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1. Letter to C. W. Stoddard, 1886
 2. Letter to Lady Taylor, included in Balfour's Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 2, p. 19

the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism: that the unpleasant giddy-mindness, which spoils the book and often gives it a wanton air of unreality and juggling with air-bells, comes from unreality of key: from the too great realism of some chapters and passages which disfigures the imagination for the rest of the remainder. Any story can be made true in its own key: any story can be made false by the choice of a wrong key of detail or style: Otto is made to feel like a drunken--I was going to say man, but let us substitute cipher--by the variations of the key."

In the following quotation, however, we find Stevenson admitting that in the last analysis, he is unable to discover what makes one particular story ring true, while another, written with greater care, persists in sounding false.

"The trouble with Olivia is, that it somehow sounds false. . . . The odd problem for what makes a story true? Markheim is true; Olivia false; and I don't know why, nor did I feel it while I worked at them; indeed I had more inspiration with Olivia, as the style shows. . . . And that again brings back (almost with the voice of despair) my unanswerable: Why is it false?"

1. Letter to C. W. Stoddard, 1886
2. Letter to Lady Taylor, included in Balfour's
3. Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol. 2, p. 19

D. Other Narrative Types Discussed by Stevenson

1. Biography

In 1881, Stevenson writes that he is having negotiations with a certain Bentley to write a life of Hazlitt. Apart from the fact that the subject appeals to him at the time,-- his interest in Hazlitt and his respect for him were greatly lessened by a perusal of the Confessio Amoris--he says that he is anxious to write biography for, "really, if I understand myself in quest of profit, I think it must be good to live with another man from birth to death."¹ Twelve years later, he writes that he likes biography better than fiction because fiction is too free.

"In biography you have your little handful of facts, little bits of a puzzle, and you sit and think, and fit 'em together this way and that, and get up and throw 'em down, and say damn, and go out for a walk. And it's real soothing; and when done, gives an idea of finish to the writer that is very peaceful. Of course, it's not really so finished as quite a rotten novel; it always has and always must have the incurable illogicalities of life about it, the fathoms of slack and the miles of tedium. Still, that's where the fun comes in; and when you have at last managed to shut up the castle spectre (dulness), the very outside of his door looks beautiful by contrast. There are pages in these books that may seem nothing to the reader; but you remember what they were, you know what they might have been, and they seem to you witty beyond comparison. In my Grandfather I've had (for instance) to give up the temporal order

1. Letter to P. G. Hammerton, 1881

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almost entirely; doubtless the temporal order is the great foe of the biographer; it is so tempting, so easy, and lo! there you are in the bog!"¹

The reason which Stevenson gives for liking biography is really no reason at all in his case, for with his great capacity for work, he obviously is not looking for the peaceful and the soothing. One is led to believe that, with a man endowed with as much imagination as Stevenson was, these avowals of preference for biography over fiction are rather prompted by temporary impatience or satiation with fiction than by an emphatic liking for biography, a surmise which is substantiated by the fact that his experience in that field was very limited. He wrote a partial life of his grandfather and a short sketch of that of his father, but the only biography which he ever actually carried to an end is that of his friend, Fleeming Jenkin. Mrs. Jenkin, who gave Stevenson what assistance she could in the writing of her husband's life, gives a description of him at work which shows him unsparing of effort in an endeavor to be absolutely exact.

"I used to go to his room after tea and tell him all I could remember of certain times and circumstances. He would listen intently, every now and then checking me while he made a short note, or asking me to repeat or amplify what I had said, if it had not been quite clear. Next morning I went to him again, and he read aloud to me what he had written--my two hours of talk compressed into a page, and yet, as it

1. Letter to Edmund Gosse, 1893

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seemed to me, all there, all expressed. He would make me note what he had written, word by word, asking me, 'Does this express exactly what you mean?' Sometimes he offered me alternative words. 'Does this express it more truly?' If I objected to any sentence as not conveying my meaning, he would alter it again and again-- unwearied in taking pains."¹

Stevenson believes that the true business of biography is to give a complete and disinterested picture of the person in question, with no concealment of vices, and no exaggeration of virtues. The biographer has no right to extoll his subject's virtues without mentioning the accompanying evil which establishes some sort of balance in his make-up; and, on the other hand, there is no excuse for his dwelling on a man's vices to the exclusion of everything good in him.

"Biography, usually so false to its office, does here for once perform for us some of the work of fiction, reminding us, that is, of the truly mingled tissue of a man's nature, and how huge faults and shining virtues cohabit and persevere in the same character."²

A certain element of sympathy must exist between the biographer and his subject. There must be some common ground of experience, some fellow feeling, or the biographer will find himself utterly beyond his depth, and will do justice neither to himself nor to his sitter.

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1. Balfour, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, vol 2, p. 25
 2. Stevenson, Books Which Have Influenced Me

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"Feelings which we share and understand enter for us into the tissue of the man's character; those to which we are strangers in our own experience we are inclined to regard as blots, exceptions, inconsistencies, and excursions of the diabolic; we conceive them with repugnance, explain them with difficulty, and raise our hands to heaven in wonder when we find them in conjunction with talents that we respect or virtues that we admire."¹

Prejudice and bias should have no place in biography. If you think a man totally bad or totally good, you have no right to write his biography, for the good reason that you have not even begun to understand him. The only way to understand other people is to understand yourself, and not until you have examined the strange assortment of vices and virtues which makes up your own character, not until you have realized that as you are, so are all men, and can recognize your own vices and virtues under various guises, are you ready to grope your way toward understanding another personality. Any beyond and above all this, you must be able to view your subject in an impersonal light.

"If you are so sensibly pained by the misconduct of your subject, and so paternally delighted with his virtues, you will always be an excellent gentleman, but a somewhat questionable biographer."²

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2. History

After learning that Stevenson wrote essays, plays, novels, short stories, poetry, fables, biography, and, to cap it all, that he played the flageolet in his spare time, one is not unduly surprised to discover that he tried his hand at history. This attempt, a history of Samoa called A Footnote to History, has no particular interest for modern readers. The issues have been dead for a long time, and the subject is utterly uninteresting for any one not closely associated with Samoa and its problems. At any rate, however, it is interesting to know that Stevenson feels that he is particularly well fitted for the task of writing this history because he has never agreed with any party, and sees merits and excuses in all of them. He plans to make his account conscientiously impartial and to weigh all sides of all questions with absolute disinterest, even though his sympathy is with the Samoans who are being shamelessly exploited by the foreign powers in control.

This idea of impartiality in writing a history brings us to the statement which Stevenson makes while commenting on Clarendon's History of the Rebellion. One gets more truth from a history written by an out-and-out partisan, he says, than from one written by a so-called impartialist who dishonestly omits all the material which does not happen to suit his purposes.

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"It is a pet idea of mine that one gets more real truth out of one avowed partisan than out of a dozen of your sham impartialists--wolves in sheep's clothing--simpering honesty as they suppress documents. After all, what one wants to know is not what people did, but why they did it--or rather, why they thought they did it; and to learn that, you should go to the men themselves. Their very falsehood is often more than another man's truth."¹

Stevenson thinks that the popular historian is forced by the very nature of his task to make his readers understand the difference in epochs rather than the individual identity of personalities. He himself feels that he has some historic sense, and he toys with the idea of writing a history for children, since none of the books in existence please him. The best one of all, he thinks, is Freeman's Old English History, but even this is not complete enough, its arrangement is imperfect, and its style is rasping. The difficulty in writing a history of any sort, he thinks, is to give the general idea of main place, growth, and movement, but in a history intended for children, "it is necessary to tack it on a yarn."² He is of the opinion that Scott, in Tales of a Grandfather, completely missed his chance to teach history, and he feels a temptation to attempt a Scotch history for children himself--a temptation which never progressed beyond the preparatory and experimental stages.

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1. Letter to Mrs. Churchill Babington, 1871
 2. Vailima Letters

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3. The Drama

Stevenson wrote four plays in collaboration with W. E. Henley: Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin, Admiral Guinea, and Macaire, but his knowledge of the technique of dramatic composition is not particularly profound. At any rate, he has not very much to offer on the subject.

To suppose that the drama consists of incident is "a strange and peculiarly English misconception,"¹ he says. That with which it deals almost exclusively is passion, and that passion must increase progressively as the play develops so that the audience may be carried from a lower to a higher stage of emotion. "A good serious play," he says, "must therefore be founded on one of the passionate cruces of life, where duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple."² And in view of the fact that the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, its main concern is with conduct, so that the emphasis here lies not on how a man manages to accomplish a certain thing, but rather on whether it is right that he should do it at all.

The dramatic author must perforce develop the action, in great measure, by means of real things, and not by artistic conventions for things. The people he deals with are real men and women whom we see, whose voices we actually hear; if the action takes place in a desert, the playwright must show us the

1. A Humble Remonstrance

2. Ibid.

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1. A Simple Renaissance
2. Ibid.

actual desert, and so on. And this type of realism, peculiar to the drama, makes for limitations in time and space, Stevenson says. The dramatic author cannot step beyond the boundaries of the stage, and he is limited, not to a moment as is the painter, but to the duration of each act and scene. But the greatest of all handicaps, in Stevenson's opinion, is the fact that the playwright can deal with nobody except his actors. So that, all in all, the means at his disposal are very limited.

"Certain moments of suspense, certain significant dispositions of personages, a certain logical growth of emotion, these are the only means at the disposal of the playwright."¹

When we are acquainted with Stevenson's general views on life and letters, it is not surprising to learn that stark tragedy to him is somewhat unconvincing. We naturally expect him to feel a sympathy for the aims and atmosphere of comedy, and he does not disappoint us. The reasons for his preference for comedy he explains thus.

"My view of life is essentially the comic; and the romantically comic. As You Like It is to me the most bird-haunted spot in letters; Tempest and Twelfth Night follow. These are what I mean by nature and poetry. I make an effort of my mind to be quite one with Moliere, except upon the stage, where his inimitable jeux de scène beggar belief; but you will observe that they are stage-plays--things ad hoc; not great Olympian debauches of the heart and fancy; hence more perfect, and

1. Victor Hugo's Romances

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4. The Fable

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not so great. Then I come, after great wanderings, to Carmosine and to Fantasio; to one part of La Dernière Aldini, to the notes that Meredith has found, Evan and the postilion, Evan and Rose, Harry in Germany. And to me these things are the good; beauty, touched with sex and laughter; beauty with God's earth for the background. Tragedy does not seem to me to come off; and when it does, it does so by the heroic illusion; the anti-masque has been omitted; laughter, which attends on all our steps in life, and sits by the deathbed, and certainly redacts the epitaph, laughter has been lost from these great-hearted lies. But the comedy which keeps the beauty and touches the terrors of our life (laughter and tragedy-in-a-good-humour having kissed), that is the last word in moved representation; embracing the greatest number of elements of fate and character; and telling its story, not with the one eye of pity, but with the two of pity and mirth."¹

Following the trend of modern thought, this old form of the fable has been followed by another "which is a fable in all points except that it is not altogether fabulous." This new form is broader and more fully comprehended, but it is like the old fable in that it is brief, that there is a moral idea behind the action, and that its object is to make the reader apprehend this moral through the intellect rather than through the emotions. The chief difference between the old method and the new is that the modern fabulist seeks analogies

1. Letter to W. E. Henley, 1884

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4. The Fable

As I said at the very beginning of this work, Stevenson thinks that the modern fable is too important a branch of creative literature to be defined in any dogmatic terms without the loss of all that is most suggestive in it. The primitive fable, however, lends itself more easily to definition.

"In the most typical form some moral precept is set forth by means of a conception purely fantastic, and usually somewhat trivial into the bargain; there is something playful about it that will not support a very exacting criticism, and the moral must be apprehended by the fancy at half a hint. It depends for much of its piquancy on the very fact that it is fantastic: the point of the thing lies in a sort of humorous inappropriateness; and it is natural enough that pleasantry of this description should become less common, as men learn to suspect some serious analogy underneath."¹

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1. Lord Lytton's Fables in Song

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where his predecessor looked for humorous situations. He seeks to establish a logical connection between the moral and the machinery employed to express it. Due to this change in technique, the moral has tended to become broader and more indefinite, so that the reader often has to rely upon his own intelligence and reasoning powers to understand it.

"The machinery, in fact, as this change is developed, becomes less and less fabulous. We find ourselves in presence of quite a serious, if quite a miniature, division of creative literature; and sometimes we have the lesson embodied in a sober, everyday narration, as in the parables of the New Testament, and sometimes merely the statement, or, at most, the collocation of significant facts in life, the reader being left to resolve for himself the vague, troublesome and not yet definitely moral sentiment which has been thus created."¹

Justifiably or not, Stevenson says, we have come to look on the ideal fabulist as one who cheerfully accepts things as they are. He is the onlooker with a sense of understanding and humor who amuses himself by pointing out the fundamental traits, inconsistencies, and peculiar humors of the human nature.

"It is as much as we can expect if the fabulist shall prove a shrewd and cheerful fellow-wayfarer, one with whom the world does not seem to have gone much amiss, but who has yet laughingly learned something of its evil. It will depend much, of course, upon our character and circumstances, whether the encounter will be agreeable and bracing to the spirits,

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"It is as much as we can expect if the fabulist shall prove a shrewd and cheerful fellow-wayfarer, one with whom the world does not seem to have gone much amiss, but who has yet laughingly learned something of its evil. It will depend much, of course, upon our character and circumstances, whether the encounter will be agreeable and pleasing to the spirit."

or offend us as an ill-timed mockery. But where there is a little tincture of bitterness along with the good nature, where it is plainly not the humour of a man cheerfully ignorant, but of one who looks on, tolerant and superior and smilingly attentive, upon the good and bad of our existence, it will go hardly if we do not catch some reflection of the same spirit to help us on our way."¹

Elaborate similes, such as the one by Lord Lytton where a little boy, who has broken off an icicle and forgotten it in the sun for a moment, finds to his dismay upon his return that it has melted into a tiny puddle of water, while his grandfather, who has eagerly stolen away to the attic to read his old love letters, discovers that they no longer have any meaning for him, are reluctantly admitted by Stevenson under the term of fable, but he thinks that in so doing he is stretching a point. In spite of his leniency in this direction, however, he warns the fabulist who writes fables modeled on the primitive form to beware of over-writing, saying that a highly-colored, too artistically perfect style looks very much out of place in such an elementary form of literature.

1. Lord Lytton's Fables in Song

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5. The Ballad

Stevenson makes only one brief reference to the ballad form in connection with a book by J. Clarke Murray entitled The Ballads and Songs of Scotland, and then only to take issue with the author's statement to the effect that the object of the ballad is the "perfect imitation of nature." Such a definition is absolutely absurd, Stevenson says, and could not be offered seriously by any one who had given two moments of intelligent thought to the matter.

"The ballad is a means of expression quite at the other end of the scale from any of the realistic arts; it is intensely abstract and subjective. This is to be learned in the infant school of art criticism."¹

"If Burns helped to change the course of literary history, it was by his frank, direct, and masterly utterance, and not by his homely choice of subjects. That was imposed upon him, not chosen upon a principle. He wrote from his own experience, because it was his lot to do so, and the tradition of the school from which he proceeded was fortunately not opposed to homely subjects. But in these homely subjects he demonstrated the rich commentary of his nature; they were all steeped in Burns; and they interest not in themselves, but because they have been passed through the spirit of a genuine and vigorous a man."²

1. Stevenson, The Ballads and Songs of Scotland

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IV. Style

"There is, indeed, only one merit worth considering in a man of letters--that he write well; and only one damning fault--that he should write ill."¹

As one of his biographers remarks, if Stevenson had seen fit to use his talents before his style had matured, he easily might have produced works which would have won him immediate popularity. As it happened, however, he chose to spend a long period of time in perfecting his style before making any bid for literary recognition, and this decision is not really surprising in view of the great importance which he attaches to "good writing." The style of Burns was his slave, he thinks, and it was by his style rather than by his matter or content that he affected Wordsworth and the world.

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1. Some Aspects of Robert Burns
 2. Ibid.

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A. Technical Elements of Style

Style, Stevenson thinks, is the invariable mark of any master craftsman, and, though not every writer can hope ever to write with the assurance and unfaltering touch of a master, it is yet the one quality which can be improved at will. Every other quality which a writer may possess--humor, imagination, creative power--is given to him at the hour of birth; style, and style alone, can be bettered by practice and industry.

"But the just and dexterous use of what qualities we have, the proportion of one part to another and to the whole, the elision of the useless, and the accentuation of the important, and the preservation of a uniform character from end to end--these, which taken together constitute technical perfection, are to some degree within the reach of industry and intellectual courage."¹

Style, taking it for granted that there is no such thing as a bad style, is never due to accident. Language is an instrument, but decidedly not an instrument that can be played by ear by the untutored, and before the writer can expect to perform a creditable solo, he must be thoroughly conversant with all the intricacies of the elements which constitute style.

1. A Note on Realism

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A. Technical Elements of Style

The apt choice and "Style is synthetic. That style is therefore the most perfect, not, as fools say, which is the most natural, for the most natural is the disjointed babble of the chronicler; but which attains the highest degree of elegant and pregnant implication unobtrusively; or if obtrusively, then with the greatest gain to sense and vigour. Even the derangement of the phrases from their (so-called) natural order is luminous for the mind; and it is by the means of such designed reversal that the elements of a judgment may be most pertinently marshalled, or the stages of a complicated action most perspicuously bound into one."

Stevenson thinks that literature, alone among the arts, suffers a distinct limitation in that it deals with words whose denotation and connotation, for the most part, have become grossly conventionalized through continuous usage in the routine of every day life. As he says,

"The sister arts enjoy the use of a plastic and ductile material, like the modeller's clay; literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words. You have seen these blocks, dear to the nursery: this one a pillar, that a pediment, a third a window or a vase. It is with blocks of just such arbitrary size and figure that the literary architect is condemned to design the palace of his art. It is, indeed, a strange art to take these blocks, rudely conceived for the purpose of the market or the bar, and by tact of application touch them to the finest meanings and distinctions, restore to them their primal energy, wittily shift them to another issue, or make

Technical Elements of Style in Literature

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of them a drum to rouse the passions."¹

The apt choice and contrast of words is the first quality which we notice and appreciate in the pages of a good writer, he thinks, so that the choice of words should be the first preoccupation of the writer. And it is not enough that he use words which are merely exact and harmonious; besides being harmonious and precise, the words should be vigorous, colorful, and suggestive. Carlyle and Macaulay both use words that are apt to express their meaning and that are harmonious in sound, but whereas "the words in Carlyle seem electrified into an energy of lineament, like the faces of men furiously moved, the words in Macaulay glide from the memory like undistinguished elements in a general effect."² Stevenson himself, like Sentimental Tommy, was willing to spend any amount of time in searching for the right word, or the right combination of words, which would make the thing which he had imagined in his own mind stand out clearly, forcibly, and unmistakably in his reader's mind. "I have spent a living half-hour upon a single clause and have a gallery of variants that would surprise you,"³ he writes in 1892, not during his period of apprenticeship, it will be noticed, but just two years before his death. And this willingness to take infinite

1. On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature

2. Ibid.

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pains to discover the words which not only will describe exactly the physical aspects of the thing he has in mind, but which will at the same time convey the exact atmosphere or connotation which he wishes them to arouse is perhaps one of the main reasons why Stevenson's style is considered one of the best in the nineteenth century. As a result of this painstaking care in the choice of words, a sense of the vivacity, fitness, and truth of words is one of the most striking qualities in all his writings. As Chesterton says,

"When Jim Pinkerton first strides into the story and is described by Stevenson as a young man 'with cordial, agitated manners,' we walk through the rest of the narrative with a living man; and listen not merely to words, but to a voice. No other two adjectives could have done the trick. When the shabby and shady lawyer, with his cockney culture and underbred refinement, is first introduced as handling a big piece of business beyond his metier, he bears himself 'with a sort of shrinking assumption.' The reader, especially if he is not a writer, may imagine that such words matter little; but if he supposes that it might just as well have been 'flinching pride' or 'qualing arrogance' he knows nothing about writing and perhaps not much about reading. The whole point is in that hitting of the right nail on the head."¹

"I remember that Mr. George Moore (who at least led the attack when Stevenson was alive and at the height of his popularity) professed in a somewhat mysterious manner to have exposed or exploded the whole trick of Stevenson, by dwelling at length on the word 'interjected', in the

1. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 153

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passage which describes a man stopping a clock with interjected finger. The obvious question to ask Mr. Moore, if he objects to the word 'interjected,' is, 'What word would you use?' He would immediately discover that any other word would be much weaker and even much less exact. To say 'interposed finger' would suggest by its very sound a much clumsier and less precise action; 'interjected' suggests by its very sound a sort of jerk of neatness; a mechanical neatness correcting mechanism. In other words, it suggests what it was meant to suggest. Stevenson used the word because it was the right word. Nobody else used it, because nobody else thought of it. And that is the whole story of Stevensonian style."¹

The love of beautiful words can be said to have been one of Stevenson's passions. He had trained his ear into a sensitive instrument quick to catch the cadence and resonance inherent in words. "I must have been taught the love of beautiful sounds before I was breeched,"² he says in one of his essays, and he cites "Jehovah Tschidkenu" as words whose beauty of sound, although the words themselves had no meaning for him when he first heard them as a child, charmed him then and have haunted him to manhood. In his Vailima Letters he recurs again and again to the liquid beauty of the Samoan language. This awareness, this instant reaction on his part to the cadence of words extended even to names, and his letters and essays abound with references to the beauty, or lack of it, in specific names. It may be mentioned in passing, merely for the interest, that

1. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 156

2. Random Memories: Rosa Quo Locorum

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Stevenson enthusiastically backs Tristram Shandy's theory of nomenclature.

"Cloudesley Shovel is a mouthful of quaint and sounding syllables."¹

"I have cause to bless one Dr. Bamford, a name the Muse repels."²

"Purser and Clinton, names of pirates; Scarlet and Bobbington, names of highwaymen. Heywood had the touch of names, I think. No man I ever knew had such a sense, such a tact for English nomenclature; Fainsforth, Lacy, Audley, Forrest, Acton, Spencer, Frankford--so his names run."³

"None can care for literature in itself who do not take a special pleasure in the sound of names; and there is no part of the world where nomenclature is so rich, poetical, humorous, and picturesque, as the United States of America. All times, races, and languages, have brought their contribution. Pekin is in the same State with Euclid, with Bellefontaine, and with Sandusky. Chelsea, with its London associations of red-brick, Sloane Square and the King's Road, is own suburb to stately and primeval Memphis; there they have their seat, translated names of cities, where the Mississippi runs by Tennessee and Arkansas. Old, red Manhattan lies, like an Indian arrowhead under a steam factory, below anglicized New York. The names of the States and Territories themselves form a chorus of sweet and most romantic vocables; Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Dakota, Iowa, Wyoming, Minnesota, and the Carolinas; there are few poems with a nobler music for the ear; a songful, tuneful land; and if the new Homer shall arise from the Western continent, his verse will be enriched, his pages sing spontaneously, with the names of states and cities that would strike the fancy in a business circular."⁴

1. The English Admirals
2. Letter to Edmund Gosse, 1880
3. Letter to W. E. Henley, 1882
4. Across the Plains

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"Jerry Abershaw--O what a title!
 Jerry Abershaw: d--n it, sir, it's a poem.
 The two most lovely words in English."1

"Even from the days of the
 Edinburgh University Magazine Stevenson had
 attached great importance to the names of
 his characters, and was never weary of
 improvising new lists for his amusement.
 'My own uncle,' he wrote to Mr. Barrie,
 'has simply the finest name in the world,
 Ramsay Traquair. Beat that you cannot.'
 But I can remember his saying to me one
 day with a tone of deep regret, 'I have
 already used up the best name in all the
 world--Mr. Soulis.'"2

"And to begin with, look what a
 pull Cromwell had over Pym--the one name
 full of resonant imperialism, the other,
 mean, pettifogging, and unheroic to a
 degree. Who would expect eloquence from
 Pym--who would read poems by Pym-- who
 would bow to the opinion of Pym? He might
 have been a dentist, but he should never
 have aspired to be a statesman. I can
 only wonder that he succeeded as he did.
 Pym and Habakkuk stand first upon the roll
 of men who have triumphed, by sheer force
 of genius, over the most unfavorable
 appellations. But even these have suffered;
 and, had they been more fitly named, the
 one might have been Lord Protector, and the
 other have shared the laurels with Isaiah.
 In this matter we must not forget that all
 our great poets have borne great names.
 Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton,
 Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley--what a constel-
 lation of lordly words! Not a single
 commonplace name among them--not a Brown,
 not a Jones, not a Robinson; they are all
 names that one would stop and look at on
 a door-plate. Now, imagine if Pepys had
 tried to clamber somehow into the enclos-
 ure of poetry, what a blot would that word
 have made upon the list!"3

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1. Letter to Henley, 1881
 2. Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 68
 3. The Philosophy of Nomenclature

"Jerry Abernethy--O what a title!
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1. Letter to Henry, 1881
2. Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 68
3. The Philosophy of Nomenclature

The first preoccupation in style is the selection of words, but there is another element which can be said to be fully as important, and that is the way in which these words are used, the manner in which they are grouped together. Each sentence, unless it be extremely brief, should be constructed according to a certain formula.

"The true business of the literary artist is to plait or weave his meaning, involving it around itself; so that each sentence, by successive phrases, shall first come into a kind of knot, and then, after a moment of suspended meaning, solve and clear itself. In every properly constructed sentence there should be observed this knot or hitch; so that (however delicately) we are led to foresee, to expect, and then to welcome the successive phrases. The pleasure may be heightened by an element of surprise, as very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested and then deftly evaded. Each phrase, besides, is to be comely in itself; and between the implication and the evolution of the sentence there should be a satisfying equipoise of sound; for nothing more often disappoints the ear than a sentence solemnly and sonorously prepared, and hastily and weakly finished. Nor should the balance be too striking and exact, for the one rule is to be infinitely various; to interest, to disappoint, to surprise, and yet still to gratify; to be ever changing, as it were, the stitch, and yet still to give the effect of an ingenious neatness."¹

The writer thus creates a technical pattern for the supersensual ear of his reader, but this pattern is not an end

in itself. It should conform throughout with the demands of logic, since perfection of structural design means nothing if it does not coincide with the development of the thought, or the argument, in question. No words should be selected and no knot tied among the phrases unless both contribute directly to the explanation or clarification of the thought. Neither the text nor the texture should be made to suffer at each other's expense. Or, in other words, the logic of the progression of the thought should not be endangered by the inclusion of chevilles; and, on the other hand, the neatness of the pattern should not be allowed to suffer because of possible obscurities in the argument.

"Pattern and argument live in each other; and it is by the brevity, clearness, charm, or emphasis of the second, that we judge the strength and fitness of the first. The web, then, or the pattern: a web at once sensuous and logical, an elegant and pregnant texture: that is style, that is the foundation of the art of literature."¹

The phrase is the next element to come under Stevenson's microscope. "Each phrase is to be comely in itself," he says, it will be remembered, in one of the passages already quoted. By this he means that the successive phrases must differ widely in length and rhythm. Unlike the versifier who follows a rhythmic pattern of standard regularity which has been imposed upon him by the laws of prosody, however much he

1. On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature

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may vary this pattern, the prose writer has to invent his own web of rhythm, and so he works with greater freedom than the versifier, but his problem is the more difficult in that he must be rhythmical without ever suggesting any regular measure. He must under no circumstances suggest a regular metre, and yet he must not disappoint the ear of the reader who has been led to expect a certain fall of rhythm. The difficulty, of course, lies in the fact that prose should be rhythmical, but that it should never be metrical.

"A single heroic line may very well pass and not disturb the somewhat larger stride of the prose style; but one following another will produce an instant impression of poverty, flatness, and disenchantment. The same lines delivered with the measured utterance of verse would perhaps seem rich in variety. By the more summary enunciation proper to prose, as to a more distant vision, these niceties of difference are lost. A whole verse is uttered as one phrase; and the ear is soon wearied by a succession of groups identical in length. The prose writer, in fact, since he is allowed to be so much less harmonious, is condemned to a perpetually fresh variety of movement on a larger scale, and must never disappoint the ear by the trot of an accepted metre."¹

Stevenson says that it is due to the inherently rhythmical strain of the English language that the author, unless he be on his guard, is led unconsciously into writing blank verse when he thinks that he is writing plain, unadulterated prose.

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Style, then, consists in the choice of apt and memorable words, the construction of sentences so that there is a knot between the implication and the explication both in thought and movement, and a pattern of rhythm in the phrases. Besides that, however, according to Stevenson, there is yet another element to be considered--the pattern of letters. He thinks that striking effects can be gained by running a recurrence of certain letters, skilfully withheld for a period, and then returned in triumphant harmony. Like every other good thing, this repetition of sound can be carried to an extreme, of course, but the judicious and dexterous use of assonance and alliteration, or the construction of an intricate pattern of tastefully selected letters, is the fourth and last preoccupation of the stylist.

"Each phrase in literature is built of sounds, as each phrase in music consists of notes. One sound suggests, echoes, demands, and harmonises with another; and the art of rightly using these concordances is the final art in literature. It used to be a piece of good advice to all young writers to avoid alliteration; and the advice was sound, in so far as it prevented daubing. None the less for that, was it abominable nonsense, and the mere raving of the blind who will not see. The beauty of the contents of a phrase, or of a sentence, depends implicitly upon alliteration and upon assonance. The vowel demands to be repeated; the consonant demands to be repeated; and both cry aloud to be perpetually varied. You may follow the adventures of a letter through any passage that has particularly pleased you;

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B. Narrative Style

find it, perhaps, denied awhile, to tantalise the ear; find it fired again at you in a whole broadside; or find it pass into congenerous sounds; one liquid or labial melting away into another."¹

This analysis of what goes to make style would present a complicated pattern for the incipient writer to follow, and would prove totally disheartening to the would-be writer who expects great things to come from his pen without any particular intellectual effort on his part. It makes clear to us, too, why Stevenson always affirmed that writing is a craft. As he says,

"We begin to see now what an intricate affair is any perfect passage; how many faculties, whether of taste or pure reason, must be held upon the stretch to make it; and why, when it is made, it should afford us so complete a pleasure. From the arrangement of according letters, which is altogether arabesque and sensual, up to the architecture of the elegant and pregnant sentence, which is a vigorous act of pure intellect, there is scarce a faculty in man but has been exercised. We need not wonder, then, if perfect sentences are rare, and perfect passages rarer."²

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"What to put in and what to leave out; whether some particular fact be organically necessary or purely ornamental; whether, if it be purely ornamental, it may not weaken or obscure the general design; and finally, whether, if we decide to use it, we should do so grossly and notably, or in some conventional disguise: are questions of plastic style continually rearising. And the sphinx that patrols the highways of executive art has no more unanswerable riddle to propound."¹

Boiled down, Stevenson's theory of narrative style is relatively simple. His idea is that the writer shall have a controlling thought of some sort, and that every paragraph, every sentence, and even every word shall march in perfect unison with it. If there is a sentence anywhere that falls out of step, a single word that might lead the reader on a tangent, away from the controlling thought, that sentence and that recalcitrant word should be struck out without the slightest hesitation. In short, Stevenson, strangely enough when one considers his tremendous literary output, has a passion for compression which is almost fanatical. Some statements of his have already been quoted in other connections, but like the vowel and the consonant, they "demand to be repeated" here for the sake of completeness.

1. A Note on Realism

Stevenson, 1883

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"The artist must omit what is tedious or irrelevant, and suppress what is tedious and necessary."¹

"There is but one art--to omit! O, if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an Iliad of a daily paper."²

The lesson which he teaches is one of condensation, excision, and, one might almost say, omission. His final plea to realists, and to all writers, on the subject of details is to reduce them in number and to increase them correspondingly in significance. But he himself, in spite of this passion for the wholesale exclusion of all tedious and unnecessary details, or perhaps because of it, struggles despairingly under the yoke. "How to get over, how to escape from the besotting particularity of fiction," he moans. "'Roland approached the house; it had green doors and window blinds; and there was a scraper on the upper step.' To hell with Roland and the scraper!"³

Stevenson's idea is that the fewer words used to express things clearly and forcibly, the better in proportion is the writing. He himself not only tries to condense two sentences into one if it is at all possible to do so without the slightest loss of emphasis and clearness, but he seems, in that same sentence, to be trying to prepare the way for the next thought which he will introduce in the following

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"Why was Jenkin an amateur in my eyes? You think because not amusing (I think he often was amusing). The reason is this: I never, or almost never, saw two pages of his work that I could not have put in one without the smallest loss of material. That is the only test I know of writing. If there is anywhere a thing said in two sentences that could have been as clearly and as engagingly and as forcibly said in one, then it's amateur work. Then you will bring me up with old Dumas. Nay, the object of a story is to be long, to fill up hours; the story-teller's invention, historical and technical, and yet not seem to water; seem on the other hand to practise that same wit of conspicuous and declaratory condensation which is the proper art of writing. That is one thing in which my stories fail: I am always cutting the flesh off their bones."¹

And again, though speaking appreciatively of Zola's Débâcle, he yet must add,

"According to my usual opinion, I believe I could go over that book and leave a masterpiece by blotting and no ulterior art. But that is an old story, ever new with me."²

"The proper method of literature is by selection, which is a kind of negative exaggeration,"³ Stevenson remarks on one occasion. In other words, to make up for the inefficacy of language, the writer, in order to gain emphasis, has the implicit right to leave out whatever does not suit his purposes. The things which he does say are thus given added

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"To exaggerate directly is to leave the saner classical tradition, and to put the reader on his guard. And when you write the whole for the half, you do not express your thought more forcibly, but only express a different thought which is not yours."¹

While enthusiastically praising W. E. Gosse's style for the qualities of "lenity, lucidity, usually a high strain of breeding, and an elegance that has a pleasant air of the accidental," Stevenson adds in a portentous tone, "But beware of purple patches."² He thinks that every author, while thoroughly able to criticize dispassionately and intelligently a rival's bad "fine writing," is so charmed by his own eloquence that he is absolutely incapable of detecting the unnecessary super-elegance in his own purple patches. In other words, the writer should beware against allowing himself to be led into fine writing merely for effect, and to show off his

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But if the writer yields to the desire to "write fine", he should at least cultivate consistency as a saving virtue. It irritates Stevenson exceedingly when an author consciously leads up to fine writing and then coyly turns his back on it and evades it. Referring to this tendency of Professor Seeley's in The Expansion of England, he exclaims irritably,

"Why will he avoid--obviously avoid--fine writing up to which he has led? This is a winking, curled-and-oiled, ultra-cultured, Oxford-don sort of an affectation that infuriates my honest soul. 'You see' --they say--'how unbombastic we are; we come right up to eloquence, and, when it's hanging on the pen, dammy, we scorn it!' It is literary Deronda-ism. If you don't want the woman, the image, or the phrase, mortify your vanity and avoid the appearance of wanting them."²

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V. The Art of Criticism

"Well, it don't look like real life."

'It's the way it was, though.'

'So it is; and what the better are we for that, if it don't look so?' cried the captain, sounding unwonted depths of art criticism."¹

A. Attributes Which the Critic Should Possess

On the assumption that the initial position in any form of writing gives a natural emphasis to the opening lines, it might be well to start this section by calling attention immediately to the most distinctive and at the same time the most important attribute which Stevenson thinks that the critic should possess. Whatever his powers of analysis or dissection, the critic's chief characteristic should be a genius, or perhaps better, a flair for sympathy. In all cases, and under any conditions, his main tool should be sympathy.

"A footnote, at least is due to the admirable example set before all young writers in the width of literary sympathy displayed by Mr. Swinburne. He runs forth to welcome merit, whether in Dickens or Trollope, whether in Villon, Milton, or Pope. This is, in criticism, the attitude we should all seek to preserve, not only in that, but in every

1. Stevenson and Osbourne, The Wrecker, p. 527

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Not only branch of literary work."¹

If the critic lacks this quality of sympathetic understanding, his work can be said to be almost without value, for he is then totally incapable of understanding the person whose efforts he is evaluating, and the result, if not incoherent, will surely be inorganic. And if there is no bond of kinship between the critic and his subject, no common denominator of understanding on which they can touch hands, there is no justification for the critic's assumption of the role of judge.

"We may praise or blame according as we find him related to us by the best or worst in ourselves; but it is only in virtue of some relationship that we can be his judges, even to condemn."²

Stevenson himself regrets having written an essay on Francois Villon because he considers him a totally bad character, and for that very reason could not do full justice to his qualities. As he says,

"Others still think well of Villon, and can find beautiful and human traits where I saw nothing but artistic evil; and by the principle of the art, those should have written of the man, and not I. Where you see no good, silence is the best."³

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Not only should the critic be motivated primarily by this spirit of sympathy, but he should concentrate on merits, and, on the whole, be rather lenient in overlooking, or at least in condoning, the faults that may accompany them.

"We do not loathe a masterpiece although we gird against its blemishes. We are not, above all, to look for faults, but merits."¹

"But it is best to dwell on merits, for it is these that are the most often overlooked."²

"Only, frankly, Colvin, do you think it a good plan to be so eminently descriptive, and even eloquent, in dispraise?"³

And incidentally, the professional critic is not the only one who should be anxious to applaud merits. Every author impinges at some time or other upon the critic's preserves by criticizing his fellow authors' work, if only for his own private pleasure and possible enlightenment, and he too will find, perhaps to his surprise, that the surest way to further his own advancement towards perfection is to follow the critic's technique of dwelling on merits rather than on imperfections.

"I was delighted to hear the good news about ----- . Bravo, he goes uphill fast. Let him beware of vanity, and he will go higher; let him still be discontented, and let him (if it might be) see the merits and not the faults of his rivals, and he may swarm at last

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to the topgallant. There is no other way. Admiration is the only road to excellence; and the critical spirit kills, but envy and injustice are putrefaction on its feet."¹

Again, to be judged fairly, a work of art must be judged by its perfection, or lack of it, as a whole, or not at all. Thus, if the critic finds himself unable to pass sentence on a work of art as a whole, he should at least benefit mankind to the extent of keeping silence on the subject, for that type of criticism which doggedly focusses its attention on isolated parts to the unjust detriment of a work as a whole is both spurious and unfair.

"It is one of the most common forms of depreciation to throw cold water on the whole by adroit over-commendation of a part, since everything worth judging, whether it be a man, a work of art, or only a fine city, must be judged upon its merits as a whole."²

"To take a man's work piecemeal, except with the design of elegant extract, is the way to avoid and not to perform, the critic's duty."³

The critic, William Archer, was taken to task by Stevenson on one occasion for his stubborn persistence in criticizing Stevenson's later works in terms of his earlier and relatively simple books of travel, and for his somewhat questionable honesty as a critic in saying that Stevenson's

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philosophy of militant courage was utterly untenable by a chronic invalid when he was perfectly aware of the fact that Stevenson was an invalid, and had, to all intents and purposes, been one for several years. And if Stevenson insists, as we have seen, that the writer, whose only aim may be to amuse and to divert his reader, should consider truth to the fact one of his most pressing duties, it is obvious, as one can see from the following passage, that he thinks that this duty rests on the critic's shoulders with double and even triple weight. Thus runs Stevenson's reprimand of Archer,

"I have read your paper with my customary admiration; it is very witty, very adroit; it contains a great deal that is excellently true (particularly the parts about my stories and the description of me as an artist in life); but you will not be surprised if I do not think it altogether just. It seems to me, in particular, that you have wilfully read all my works in terms of my earliest; my aim, even in style, has quite changed in the last six or seven years; and this I should have thought you would have noticed. Again, your first remark upon the affectation of the italic names; a practice only followed in my two affected little books of travel, where a typographical minauderie of the sort appeared to me in character; and what you say of it, then, is quite just. But why should you forget yourself and use these same italics as an index to my theology some pages further on? This is lightness of

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touch indeed; may I say, it is almost sharpness of practice? Are you, too, not in the witness-box? And if you are, why take a wilfully false hypothesis? If you knew I was a chronic invalid, why say that my philosophy was unsuitable to such a case? My call for facts is not so general as yours, but an essential fact should not be put the other way about. And now enough said; it were hard if a poor man could not criticise another without having so much ink shed against him. But I shall still regret you should have written on an hypothesis you knew to be untenable, and that you should thus have made your paper, for those who do not know me, essentially unfair. Well, here is my worst quarrel with you. You take my young books as my last word."¹

To judge a man's work as a whole, intelligently recognizing and acknowledging natural growth in power and possible changes in aim, is the critic's starting point, then, but the point is that the critic should not trespass into another author's "whole" and nonchalantly appropriate it with the well-meaning, but hardly laudable, intention of adding undue prestige to his sitter of the moment. In his enthusiasm, and impelled by the desire to do full justice to the person whom he is discussing, the critic may unconsciously and yet, to be paradoxical, wilfully blind his eyes to the credit which should be given to the predecessors or contemporaries of his sitter who may, directly or indirectly have helped him to

1. Letter to William Archer, 1885

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achieve what he has accomplished. And this well-meaning but absolutely unfair and unethical procedure is exactly what the critic should guard against. He should be willing to give credit where credit is due, but he should make sure that he has the right addresses when he is out distributing his laurels. Stevenson brings this particular point up in connection with the two poets, Burns and Fergusson. He has read any number of biographies of Burns, he says, but he cannot remember a single book in which Fergusson, who, he thinks, had a great influence on Burns, was not sacrificed to the exaltation of the latter's originality.

"There is a kind of gaping admiration that would fain roll Shakespeare and Bacon into one, to have a bigger thing to gape at; and a class of men who cannot edit one author without disparaging all others."¹

1. Edinburgh

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B. Limitations Inherent in the Short Critical Essay

The first and main disadvantage in this form of writing is that the critic, unlike the biographer who is restricted neither by time nor space, must cram within a relatively small number of pages the leading events and formative influences of his subject's life, and the general impression made upon his own mind by any number of books. The result, of course, is that he has to condense his material with a vengeance. And since the only justification of this sort of criticism is that the author shall present "a brief, reasoned, and memorable view", it follows that the condensation must be "logical and striking."¹ In order to achieve this vividness in spite of the brevity of his work, the critic is forced to work solely by negative exaggeration, omitting all the circumstances which do not contribute directly to the main impression for which he is striving at the moment, although these same circumstances might figure very importantly in another study aiming to present a different effect. Thus, the circumstances mentioned are given almost undue prominence by the absence of those which are not included, and this fact in itself, Stevenson thinks, is enough to give a certain falseness to the work.

1. Preface of Familiar Studies of Men and Books

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Another limitation lies in the fact that the author is absolutely forced to write from a certain point of view, since it is impossible for him to present a complete picture. He can view his sitter from one side only, and even then only from a certain angle. And once he has chosen the particular angle from which he will sight his subject, the critic must adhere meticulously throughout the work to the point of view which he has selected. Stevenson thinks that the critic in this case probably seems rather to differentiate than truly to characterize, but at any rate, there is no doubt whatever that "the proportions of the sitter must be sacrificed to the proportions of the canvas."¹

Macaulay and Carlyle, whom Stevenson considers the two English masters of the short critical study, clearly exemplify the limitations of this type of criticism.

"Carlyle, indeed, had so much more depth and knowledge of the heart, his portraits of mankind are felt and rendered with so much more poetic comprehension, and he, like his favorite Ram Dass, had a fire in his belly so much more hotly burning than the patent reading lamp by which Macaulay studied, that it seems at first sight hardly fair to bracket them together. But the point of view was imposed by Carlyle on the men he judged of in his writings with an austerity not only cruel but almost

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stupid. The rhetorical artifice of Macaulay is easily spied; it will take longer to appreciate the moral bias of Carlyle. So with all writers who insist on forcing some significance from all that comes before them; and, the writer of short studies is bound, by the necessity of the case, to write entirely in that spirit. What he cannot vivify he should omit."¹

Stevenson not only thinks that it is inadvisable to rewrite or to try to change critical essays once they have been completed, but he affirms that it is an impossible feat. As he says, "Short studies are, or should be, things woven like a carpet, from which it is impossible to detach a strand. What is perverted has its place there forever, as a part of the technical means by which what is right has been presented."² If the critic is not satisfied with the result, there is only one thing which he can do about it; he can write another study from a different point of view, but since he will perforce have to follow the same technique which he used to write the first essay, the chances are very even that the new point of view will lead to nothing except new perversions. Stevenson's practice, typical of him, is to allow his studies to stand without corrections as they were first written, and to offer "a few grains of salt," in the form of notes of explanation and apology, "to be taken with the text."³

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C. Stevenson's Reaction to Criticism

Stevenson's reaction to criticism of his works seems to have been rather unusual. Adverse, hostile criticism does not seem to have disturbed the even tenor of his days in the least. As he says, "I do not know that I am sensitive to criticism, if it be hostile."¹ On the other hand, nobody is more willing to take criticism offered in a friendly spirit more to heart than he.

"I am sensitive, indeed, when it is friendly criticism; and when I read such criticism as yours, I am emboldened to go on and praise God."²

From the early inexperienced days of An Inland Voyage, praise of any particular work, instead of making him feel smugly satisfied with his achievement, has spurred him on to greater effort in the name of perfection.

"About criticisms, I was more surprised at the tone of the critics than I suppose anyone else. And the effect it has produced in me is one of shame. If they liked An Inland Voyage so much, I ought to have given them something better, that's all. And I shall try to do so."³

Never was a man more amused and less disconcerted when people discover his little foibles and literary shortcomings. "I have seen the article;" he writes to Henry James, "and it may be from natural partiality, I think it the best

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you have written. It is so humorous, and it hits my little frailties with so neat (and so friendly) a touch."¹ Again, in reference to an article by William Archer, which would have incensed many authors and sadly deflated their pride, he writes with perfect good nature.

"Pray see, in the November Time, a very clever fellow, W. Archer, stating his views of me; the 'rosy-gilled athletico-aesthete;' and warning me, in a fatherly manner, that a rheumatic fever would try my philosophy (as indeed it would), and that my gospel would not do for 'those who are shut out from the exercise of any manly virtue save renunciation.' To those who know that rickety and cloistered spectre, the real R. L. S., the paper, besides being clever in itself, presents rare elements of sport. The critical parts are in particular very bright and neat. Often excellently true. Get it by all manner of means."²

Not only does he possess that thrice blessed quality of being able to enjoy a chuckle at his own expense, but he is ever quick to acknowledge any mistakes on his part, and to grant unconditional victory to the critic who has brought him to heel.

"I had to thank you, besides, for a triumphant exposure of a paradox of my own. True: you are right, I was wrong."³

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1. Letter to Henry James, 1887
2. Letter to Henry James, 1888
3. Letter to Richard La Gallienne, 1893

"Your jubilation over Catriona did me good, and still more the subtlety and truth of your remark on the starving of the visual sense in that book. 'Tis true, and unless I make the greater effort--and am as a step to that, convinced of its necessity--it will be more true, I fear, in the future."1

Barrie, in An Edinburgh Eleven which appeared a few years before Stevenson's death, had included a paper on Stevenson. The article praised him generously on the whole, although Barrie insisted that it was more than high time for him to stop his literary philandering and urged him to settle down to serious work. But the point is that the essay was couched in a tone somewhat impertinent, coming from one so much younger in years and experience. In retaliation, Stevenson, instead of retaliating, loses all his resentment, if he experienced any, in unstinted admiration of Barrie's genius. And this unselfish homage, this forgetfulness of self in sincere praise of a potential rival on Stevenson's part is the best index one could find to Stevenson's spirit, both in giving and in receiving criticism.

"I have been off my work for some time, and re-read the Edinburgh Eleven, and had a great mind to write a parody and give you all your sauce back again, and see how you would like it yourself. And then

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3. Criticism of Pro I read The Window in Thrums; I don't say that it is better than The Minister; it has more real flaws; but somehow it is--well, I read it last anyway, and it's by Barrie. And he's the man for my money. I am a capable artist; but it begins to look to me as if you were a man of genius."¹

My first group then chronologically, the most form of literature which they wrote. However, this method presented many problems since, juggle them as I would, I was always left with one lone biographer, one lone diarist, one lone Russian novelist, and a discouraging number of stubborn ones who insisted upon being included among the novelists and the short story writers, and so on. As a result of this, and because most of these criticisms are entirely fragmentary and disconnected, and, for the most part, bear no relation one to the other, the wisest, and at the same time the simplest, procedure has been to present them alphabetically, with Addison heading the list.

1. Letter to Barrie, 1892

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D. Criticism of Prose Writers by Stevenson

My first thought in listing these authors was to group them chronologically according to nationality, and the form of literature which they wrote. However, this method presented many problems since, juggle them as I would, I was always left with one lone biographer, one lone diarist, one lone Russian novelist, and a discouraging number of stubborn ones who insisted upon being included among the novelists and the short story writers, and so on. As a result of this, and because most of these criticisms are entirely fragmentary and disconnected, and, for the most part, bear no relation one to the other, the wisest, and at the same time the simplest, procedure has been to present them alphabetically, with Addison heading the list.

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Addison

Stevenson was told more than once that his style was very similar to Addison's and that he therefore must have been greatly influenced by the eighteenth century essayist. As a matter of fact, Stevenson could not abide Addison's manner of writing, and in one of his few allusions to him, he refers to him as "Addison, of whom I could never read a word."¹ And the Spectator does not find more favor in his eyes.

"I have tried to read the Spectator, which they all say I imitate, and--it's very wrong of me, I know--but I can't. It's all very fine, you know, and all that, but it's vapid."²

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Honore de Balzac

Stevenson feels that there is a lasting bond between himself and Balzac. While planning a book, Sophia Scarlet, which he never wrote, Stevenson makes the remark that the first start of a novel is difficult, that it is hard to slide in the necessary information to the reader without being tedious, and he adds,

"The problem is exactly a Balzac one, and I wish I had his fist --for I have already a better method-- the kinetic, whereas he continually allowed himself to be led into the static."¹

"Three people have had it, the real creator's brush: Scott, Balzac, and Thackeray in Vanity Fair. Everybody else either paints thin, or has to stop to paint, or paints excitedly, so that you see the author skipping before his canvas."²

Barrie's talent is a great one, then, in Stevenson's estimation, but he is also of the opinion that there is too much of the journalist in his make-up.

"But Barrie is a beauty. The Little Minister and The Window in Thorne. Ah! that is that young man; but he must

1. Vailima Letters

2. Ibid.

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and Thackeray in Vanity Fair. Everybody
else either paints what, or has to stop
to paint, or paints excitedly, so that
you see the author sleeping before his
canvas."2

Barrie

Stevenson feels that there is a lasting bond between himself and Barrie because both are Scots, "and I suspect both rather Scotty Scots," because both have made their "stages in the metropolis of the winds," and lastly, of course, because both are authors. Moreover, he has a great admiration for Barrie's works and talent, and humbles his own talent and achievement to give the greater praise to his compatriot. The following excerpt is from a letter addressed to Barrie.

"There are two of us now that the Shirra might have patted on the head. And please do not think when I thus seem to bracket myself with you, that I am wholly blinded with vanity. Jess is beyond my frontier line; I could not touch her skirt; I have no such glamour of twilight on my pen. I am a capable artist; but it begins to look to me as if you were a man of genius. Take care of yourself for my sake. It's a devilish hard thing for a man who writes so many novels as I do, that I should get so few to read. And I can read yours, and I love them."1

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"But Barrie is a beauty,
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Boswell

see and not be too funny. Genius in him, but there's a journalist at his elbow--there's the risk."¹

"Tibbie Burse in the Bur'al is great, but I think it was a journalist that got in the word 'official.'²

Paul Bourget

"I am delighted beyond expression by Bourget's Sensations d'Italie: he has phrases which affect me almost like Montaigne; I had read ere this a masterly essay of his on Pascal; this book does it; I write for all his essays by this mail, and shall try to meet him when I come to Europe.

Next day.

I have just been breakfasting at Raja and Brionisi, and the charm of Bourget haggides me. I wonder if this exquisite fellow, all made of fiddle-strings and scent and intelligence, could bear any of my bald prose. If you think he could, ask Calvin to send him a copy of these last essays of mine when they appear; and tell Bourget they go to him from a South Sea Island as literal homage. I have read no book for years that gave me the same literary thrill as his Sensations d'Italie. If (as I imagine) my out-and-dry literature would be death to him, and worse than death--journalism--be silent on the point. For I have a great curiosity to know him, and if he doesn't know my work, I shall have the better chance of making his acquaintance.

Here I broke off, and wrote Bourget a dedication; no use resisting; it's a love affair. O, he's exquisite, I bless you for the gift of him. I have really enjoyed this book as I--almost as I--used to enjoy books when I was going twenty--twenty-three; and these are the

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 2. Letter to Barrie, 1892

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"Tippie Burrise in the Enquirer
is great, but I think it was a journal-
ist that got in the word 'official.'"

I. Letter to Henry James, 1892
S. Letter to Barrie, 1892

Boswell

In 1876 Stevenson writes, "I'm reading Boswell daily by way of a Bible; I mean to read Boswell now until the day I die."¹

Paul Bourget

"I am delighted beyond expression by Bourget's Sensations d'Italie: he has phrases which affect me almost like Montaigne; I had read ere this a masterly essay of his on Pascal; this book does it; I write for all his essays by this mail, and shall try to meet him when I come to Europe.

Next day.

I have just been breakfasting at Baja and Brindisi, and the charm of Bourget hagrises me. I wonder if this exquisite fellow, all made of fiddle-strings and scent and intelligence, could bear any of my bald prose. If you think he could, ask Colvin to send him a copy of these last essays of mine when they appear; and tell Bourget they go to him from a South Sea Island as literal homage. I have read no book for years that gave me the same literary thrill as his Sensations d'Italie. If (as I imagine) my cut-and-dry literature would be death to him, and worse than death--journalism--be silent on the point. For I have a great curiosity to know him, and if he doesn't know my work, I shall have the better chance of making his acquaintance.

Here I broke off, and wrote Bourget a dedication; no use resisting; it's a love affair. O, he's exquisite, I bless you for the gift of him. I have really enjoyed this book as I--almost as I--used to enjoy books when I was going twenty--twenty-three; and these are the years for reading!"²

1. Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, 1876
2. Letter to Henry James, 1891

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Bunyan

Stevenson's comments on Bunyan hardly vary from those of all the critics who have ever evaluated his work. Pilgrim's Progress is characterized by him as a book "that breathes of every beautiful and valuable emotion."¹

"Throughout his best and worst, in his highest and most divine imaginations as in the narrowest sallies of his sectarianism, the human-hearted piety of Bunyan touches and ennobles, convinces, accuses the reader."²

The author is described as "the fervent Bunyan, breathing hurry and momentary inspiration,"³ who sometimes forgets what he has written the day before, and so is inconsistent at times. He is likened to a man "hunting sinners with the lasso," a man so filled with the zeal to save souls that he is afraid of nothing and dares to say anything, even at the risk of appearing ridiculous. And it is this intense faith of his, strong enough to move mountains, which induces the clearness, literality of vision, and simplicity which are his chief characteristics.

"In every page the book is stamped with the same energy of vision and the same energy of belief. The quality is equally and indifferently displayed in the spirit of the fighting, the tenderness of the pathos, the startling vigour and strangeness of the incidents, the natural strain of the

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1. Books Which Have Influenced Me
 2. Bagster's Pilgrim's Progress

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conversation, and the humanity and charm of the characters. Trivial talk over a meal, the dying words of heroes, the delights of Beulah or the Celestial City, ... all have been imagined with the same clearness, all written of with equal gusto and precision, all created in the same mixed element, of simplicity that is almost comical, and art that, for its purpose, is faultless."¹

Bunyan's style is like "the talk of strong uneducated men which still charms by its simplicity when it does not impress by its force."² His fancy is one of "quaintness and power, triviality and surprising freshness."³

There are times, Stevenson thinks, when Bunyan's keen insight into life makes his allegory go so deep that, "to people looking seriously on life, it cuts like satire."⁴ On the other hand, he thinks that all writers of allegories tend to forget and to neglect the moral as they become more and more interested in the characters and incidents which were designed to embody the moral. And even Bunyan is no real exception to the rule. His allegory is never completely out of his mind, but his faith is so intense that his characters become as real to him as living persons, and he sometimes forgets the end for which they were created, including details which have nothing whatever to do with the allegorical design.

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1. Bagster's Pilgrim's Progress
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

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1. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

Carlyle

"We can follow him step by step into the trap which he lays for himself by his own entire good faith and triumphant literality of vision, till the trap closes and shuts him in an inconsistency. The post between Beulah and the Celestial City sounds his horn, as you may yet hear in country places. Madame Bubble, that 'tall comely dame, something of a swarthy complexion, in very pleasant attire, but old,'--'gives you a smile at the end of each sentence' --a real woman, she; we all know her. Christian dying 'gave Mr. Standfast a ring,' for no possible reason in the allegory, merely because the touch was human and affecting. Last and most remarkable, 'My sword,' says the dying Valiant-for-the-truth, he in whom Great-heart delighted, 'my sword I leave to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it.' And after this boast, more arrogantly unorthodox than was ever dreamed of by the rejected Ignorance, we are told that 'all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.'"1

But--but--there are two sides to all things, and the old scalded baby had his noble side."1

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Carlyle

Apart from saying that Carlyle imposed his point of view with moral bias and prejudice on the people whom he judged, to which reference has already been made, Stevenson makes only one reference to "the old scalded baby."

"Yes, Carlyle was ashamed of himself as few men have been; and let all carpers look at what he did. He prepared all these papers for publication with his own hand; all his wife's complaints, all the evidence of his own misconduct: who else would have done so much? Is repentance, which God accepts, to have no avail with men? nor even with the dead? I have heard too much against the thrawn, discomfutable dog: dead he is, and we may be glad of it; but he was a better man than most of us, no less patently than he was a worse. To fill the world with whining is against all my views: I do not like impiety. But--but--there are two sides to all things, and the old scalded baby had his noble side."¹

1. Letter to Thomas Stevenson, 1885

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Marion Crawford

Dickens was "an art" "I can almost always get a happy day out of Marion Crawford--ce n'est pas toujours la guerre, but it's got life to it, and guts, and it moves. Did you read The Witch of Prague? Nobody could read it twice, of course; and the first time even it was necessary to skip."¹

Daudet

Ray gentlemen, it will be remembered, was largely due to Dickens' method of individualising his characters to the 'nth degree.

"The best of the present French novelists seems to me, incomparably, Daudet. Les Rois en Exil comes very near being a masterpiece."²

"negative success." The days of Dombey and Barnaby Rudge are days "from which the lover of Dickens willingly averts his eyes."² Great Expectations is good enough to have induced Stevenson and Henley to turn it into a play, but in the process of dramatisation most of Dickens is expurgated and "rolled away."

"Your remarks on Great Expectations are very good. We have both re-read it this winter, and I, in a manner, twice. The object being a play; the play, in its rough outline, I now see; and it is extraordinary how much of Dickens had to be discarded as unhuman, impossible, and ineffective: all that really remains is

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1. Letter to Henry James, 1892
 2. Letter to Alexander Ireland, 1882

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Dickens

Dickens was "an artist, the most strenuous, one of the most endowed; and for how many years he laboured in vain to create a gentleman. In part after part, novel after novel, a whole menagerie of characters, the good, the bad, the droll, and the tragic came at his beck like slaves about an oriental despot; there was only one who stayed away."¹ This inability to portray gentlemen, it will be remembered, was largely due to Dickens' method of individualizing his characters to the 'nth degree.

David Copperfield, in Stevenson's estimation, is a "negative success." The days of Dombey and Dorrit are days "from which the lover of Dickens willingly averts his eyes."² Great Expectations is good enough to have induced Stevenson and Henley to turn it into a play, but in the process of dramatisation most of Dickens is expurgated and "rolled away."

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1. Some Gentlemen in Fiction

2. Ibid.

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Dostoevsky

the loan of a file (but from a grown-up young man who knows what he was doing, and to a convict who, although he does not know it, is his father--the father knows it is his son), and the fact of the convict-father's return and disclosure of himself to the son whom he has made rich. Everything else has been thrown aside. I have great hopes of this piece, which is very amiable and, in places, very strong indeed: but it was curious how Dickens had to be rolled away; he had made his story turn on such improbabilities, such fantastic trifles, not on a good human basis, such as I recognised. The only really well-executed scenes are the riverside ones; the escape in particular is excellent; and I may add, the capture of the two convicts at the beginning. Miss Havisham is, probably, the worst thing in human fiction. But Wemmick I like; and I like Trabb's boy; and Mr. Wopsle as Hamlet is splendid."¹

Another has been translated--Humilités et Offenses. It is even more incoherent than Le Crime et le Châtiment, but breathes much of the same lovely goodness, and has passages of power. Dostoevsky is a devil of a swell, to be sure. Have you heard that he became a stout, imperialist conservative? It is interesting to know."¹

1. Letter to Thomas Stevenson, 1883

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"Le Crime et le Châtiment is easily the greatest book I have read in ten years. Many find it dull: Henry James could not finish it; all I can say is, it nearly finished me. It was like having an illness. James did not care for it because the character of Raskolnikoff was not objective; and at that I divined a great gulf between us, and, on further reflection, the existence of a certain impotence in many minds of to-day, which prevents them from living in a book or a character, and keeps them standing afar off, spectators of a puppet show. To such I suppose the book may seem empty in the centre; to the others it is a room, a house of life, into which they themselves enter, and are tortured and purified. The Juge d'Instruction I thought a wonderful, weird, touching, ingenious creation: the drunken father, and Sonia, and the student friend, and the uncircumscribed, protoplasmic humanity of Raskolnikoff, all upon a level that filled me with wonder: the execution also, superb in places.

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Stevenson graciously compliments Doyle on Sherlock Holmes, saying that the adventures are "very interesting and ingenious," and then adds, still graciously but somewhat tactlessly, that it belongs to the class of literature which he likes when he has a toothache.

"As a matter of fact, it was a pleurisy I was enjoying when I took the volume up; and it will interest you as a medical man to know that the cure was for the moment effectual."¹

"Have read The Refugees: Conde and old P. Murat very good; Louis XIV, and Louvois with the letter-bag very rich. You have reached a trifle wide perhaps; too many celebrities. ... Old Murat is perhaps your high-water mark; 'tis excellently human, cheerful, and real. Do it again. Madame de Maintenon struck me as quite good. Have you any documents for the decapitation? It sounds steepish. I am much interested with this book, which fulfills a good deal, and promises more."²

"Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is d'Artagnan of the Vicomte de Bragelonne. I know not a more human soul, nor in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers."³

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1. Letter to Sir Arthur C. Doyle, 1893
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Dumas

Dumas, more than any modern, captures some of the spirit of the authors of Arabian Nights' Entertainment in the purely material charm of some of his romances.

"The early part of Monte Cristo, down to the finding of the treasure, is a piece of perfect story-telling; the man never breathed who shared these moving incidents without a tremor; and yet Faria is a thing of packthread and Dantes little more than a name. The sequel is one long-drawn error, gloomy, bloody, unnatural, and dull; but as for these early chapters, I do not believe there is another volume extant where you can breathe the same unmingled atmosphere of romance. It is very thin and light, to be sure, as on a high mountain; but it is brisk and clear and sunny in proportion."¹

His "spirited, boyish, but really adequate presentation of character"² is entirely satisfactory to Stevenson. At least, the elderly d'Artagnan of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is of all the characters in literature the best loved by him.

"Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is d'Artagnan of the Vicomte de Bragelonne. I know not a more human soul, nor in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers."³

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and, at a loss to understand "Athos, with the coming of years, has declined too much into the preacher, and the preacher of a sapless creed; but d'Artagnan has mellowed into a man so witty, rough, kind and upright, that he takes the heart by storm. There is nothing of the copy-book about his virtues, nothing of the drawing-room in his fine, natural civility; he will sail near the wind; he is no district visitor--no Wesley or Robespierre; his conscience is void of all refinement whether for good or evil; but the whole man rings true like a good sovereign. Here, and throughout, if I am to choose virtues for myself or my friends, let me choose the virtues of d'Artagnan. I do not say there is no character as well drawn in Shakespeare. I do say there is none that I love so wholly. There are many spiritual eyes that seem to spy upon our actions--eyes of the dead and the absent, whom we imagine to behold us in our most private hours, and whom we fear and scruple to offend: our witnesses and judges. And among these, even if you should think me childish, I must count my d'Artagnan--not d'Artagnan of the memoirs whom Thackeray pretended to prefer--a preference, I take the freedom of saying, in which he stands alone; not the d'Artagnan of flesh and blood, but him of the ink and paper; not Nature's but Dumas's."1

The Vicomte de Bragelonne, together with one or two of Scott's novels, Shakespeare, Molière, Montaigne, and The Egoist, belongs to the inner circle of Stevenson's intimates; and I dare say that of them all it is the best loved by him. He is puzzled when he compares its popularity with that of The Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers,

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"Alas, with the coming of years, has declined too much into the preacher, and the preacher of a sagacious creed; but d'Aragon has mellowed into a man so witty, rough, kind and upright, that he takes the heart by storm. There is nothing of the copy-book about his virtues, nothing of the drawing-room in his line, natural civility; he will sail near the wind; he is no distant visitor--no Wesley or Hopespiter; his conscience is void of all refinement whether for good or evil; but the whole man rings true like a good sovereign. . . . Here, and throughout, if I am to choose virtues for myself or my friends, let me choose the virtues of d'Aragon. I do not say there is no character as well drawn in Shakespeares, I do say there is none that I love so wholly. There are many spiritual eyes that seem to spy upon our actions--eyes of the dead and the absent, whom we imagine to behold us in our most private hours, and whom we fear and scruple to offend: our witnesses and judges. And among these, even if you should think me childish, I must count my d'Aragon--not d'Aragon of the memoirs whom Thackeray pretended to prefer--a preference, I take the freedom of saying, in which he stands alone; not the d'Aragon of flesh and blood, but him of the ink and paper; not Nature's but Dumas's."

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and, at a loss to understand the general indifference of the world for the book, he tries to figure out why it has found favor with such a relatively small percentage of readers.

The Vicomte de Bragelonne is the sixth book in the series of which Vingt Ans Après is the first, and he thinks that the unprepossessing character of the titular hero, who makes his first appearance in Vingt Ans Après, may well have discouraged many people from beginning the perusal of a book that bears his name.

"A man might well stand back if he supposed he were to follow, for six volumes, so well-conducted, so fine-spoken, and withal so dreary a cavalier as Bragelonne. But the fear is idle. I may be said to have passed the best years of my life in these six volumes, and my acquaintance with Raoul has never gone beyond a bow."¹

"Or perhaps it is La Valliere that the reader of Vingt Ans Après is inclined to flee. Well, he is right there too, though not so right. Louise is no success. Her creator has spared no pains; she is well-meant, not ill-designed, sometimes has a word that rings out true; sometimes, if only for a breath, she may even engage our sympathies. Madame enchants me; I can forgive that royal minx her most serious offenses; I can thrill and soften with the King on that memorable occasion when he goes to upbraid and remains to flirt; and when it comes to the 'Allons, aimez-moi donc,' it is my heart that melts in the bosom of de Guiche. Not so with Louise."²

1. Stevenson, A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's
 2. Ibid.

and, at a loss to understand the general indifference of the world for the book, he tries to figure out why it has found favor with such a relatively small percentage of readers. The Visconte de Bragelonne is the sixth book in the series of which Vingt Ans Aprés is the first, and he thinks that the unprepossessing character of the titular hero, who makes his first appearance in Vingt Ans Aprés, may well have discouraged many people from beginning the perusal of a book that bears his name.

"A man might well stand back if he supposed he were to follow, for six volumes, so well-conducted, so fine-spoken, and withal so greedy a cavalier as Bragelonne. But the fear is idle. I may be said to have passed the best years of my life in these six volumes, and my acquaintance with Raoul has never gone beyond a bow."

"Or perhaps it is La Vallière that the reader of Vingt Ans Aprés is inclined to flee. Well, he is right there too, though not so right. Louise is no success. Her creator has spared no pains; she is well-meant, not ill-designed; sometimes has a word that rings out true; sometimes, if only for a breath, she may even engage our sympathies. Madame enchants me; I can forgive that royal minx her most serious offenses; I can thrill and soften with the King on that memorable occasion when he goes to upbraid and remains to flirt; and when it comes to the 'Alions, aimez-moi donc,' it is my heart that melts in the bosom of de Guiche. Not so with Louise."

"Or perhaps, again, a proportion of readers stumble at the threshold. In so vast a mansion there were sure to be back stairs and kitchen offices where no one would delight to linger; but it was at least unhappy that the vestibule should be so badly lighted; and until, in the seventeenth chapter, d'Artagnan sets off to seek his friends, I must confess, the book goes heavily enough. But, from thenceforward, what a feast is spread!"¹

At any rate, Stevenson himself read the book five or six times, and liked it better and admired it more every time he read it. Listen to his account of one of these perusals when he was living alone upon the Pentlands.

"I would return in the early night from one of my patrols with the shepherd; a friendly face would meet me in the door, a friendly retriever would scurry upstairs to fetch my slippers; and I would sit down with the Vicomte for a long, silent, solitary lamplight evening by the fire. And yet I know not why I call it silent, when it was enlivened with such a clatter of horse-shoes, and such a rattle of musketry, and such a stir of talk; or why I call those evenings solitary in which I gained so many friends. I would rise from my book and pull the blind aside, and see the snow and the glittering hollies chequer a Scotch garden, and the winter moonlight brighten the white hills. Thence I would turn again to that crowded and sunny field of life in which it was so easy to forget myself, my cares, and my surroundings: a place busy as a city, bright as a theatre, thronged with memorable faces, and sounding with delightful speech. I carried the thread of that epic into my slumbers, I woke with it unbroken, I rejoiced to plunge into the book again at breakfast, it was with a pang that I must lay it down and turn to my own labours; for no part of the world has ever seemed

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to me so charming as these pages."¹

The novel has many qualities, but it is in vain that one looks in it for narrow, puritanical morality. That morality which it contains is wholesome, but it is broad and genial.

"What other novel has such epic variety and nobility of incident? Often, if you will, impossible; often of the order of an Arabian story; and yet all based in human nature. For if you come to that, what novel has more human nature? not studied with the microscope, but seen largely, in plain daylight, with the natural eye. What novel has more good sense, and gaiety, and wit, and unflagging, admirable literary skill? Good souls, I suppose, must sometimes read it in the blackguard travesty of a translation. But there is no style more untranslatable; light as a whipped trifle, strong as silk; wordy like a village tale; pat like a general's despatch; with every fault, yet never tedious; with no merit, yet inimitably right. And, once more, to make an end of commendations, what novel is inspired with a more unstrained or a more wholesome morality? I would scarce send to the Vicomte a reader who was in quest of what we may call puritan morality. The ventripotent mulatto, the great eater, worker, earner and waster, the man of much and witty laughter, the man of the great heart and alas! of the doubtful honesty, is a figure not yet clearly set before the world; he still awaits a sober and yet genial portrait; but with whatever art that may be touched, and whatever indulgence, it will not be the portrait of a precisian. In a man who finds all things good, you will scarce expect much zeal for

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negative virtues; the active alone will have a charm for him; abstinence, however wise, however kind, will always seem to such a judge entirely mean and partly impious. So with Dumas. Chastity is not near his heart; nor yet, to his own sore cost, that virtue of frugality which is the armour of the artist. And it is elsewhere, it is in the character of d'Artagnan, that we must look for that spirit of morality, which is one of the chief merits of the book, makes one of the main joys of its perusal, and sets it high above more popular rivals."¹

One point in the book which Stevenson finds incomparable is the manner in which the end of life is represented. The characters grow old and die off one by one, and yet the reader breathes no sigh of regret at his last glimpse of them, not, as in Trollope's books, because he has grown tired and bored with them, but because the thing is so well done that he realizes that they have finished their work and that it is fitting and natural that they should go.

"I find a singular charm of spirit in this last volume. It breathes a pleasant and a tonic sadness, always brave, never hysterical. Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tale, evening gradually falls; and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away one by one. One by one they go, and not a regret embitters their departure; the young succeed them in their places, Louis Quatorze is swelling larger and shining broader, another generation and another France dawn on the horizon; but for us and these old men whom we have loved so long, the inevitable draws near and is welcome. To read this well is to anticipate experience.

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James Walter Ferriss Ah, if only when these hours of the long shadows fall for us in reality and not in figure, we may hope to face them with a mind as quiet!"¹

George Eliot

Except for his statement to the effect that Tito Melema is the best of all male characterizations by women novelists, and that even he cannot hide the fact that he was imagined by a woman, Stevenson makes only one reference to George Eliot.

"I agreed pretty well with all you said about George Eliot; a high, but --may we not add?--a rather dry lady. that melancholy puppy and humbug Daniel Deronda--the Prince of Prigs; the literary abomination of desolation in the way of manhood; a type which is enough to make a man forswear the love of women, if that is how it must be gained. Hats off all the same, you understand: a woman of genius."²

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1. Stevenson, A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's
 2. Letter to A. Patchett Martin, 1877

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 felt in him; not yet, so his own sense
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James Walter Ferrier

Stevenson's essay, Old Mortality, deals for the greater part with the attributes of Ferrier as a man and as a friend, but the only book of his which Stevenson criticizes, and that in the indulgent tones of a friend, is Mottiscliffe.

"Mottiscliffe, patently a first book, has many engaging qualities. There is no story to speak of. The characters are mostly very slight sketches. Sir Valentine Ormathwaite, indeed, makes a capital mouthpiece for the author's own vein of reflection, which is whimsical, humorous, and man-of-the-wordly, in an odd but highly palatable mixture. But the delight of the book lies in a sort of lazy, Epicurean atmosphere, which wooingly pervades the reader as he advances from page to page. The lines have fallen to him in pleasant places, and everyone around him is content. The rector dozes away the warm afternoon on manifold cushions: Sir Valentine smokes interminable cigars; the girls are playing croquet or bathing; thirsty souls have an eye to an afternoon drink; and you may be sure that there is some mild junketing on hand for the evening or the next day. Is there nothing happening? Well, perhaps not; unless you count it something to make the acquaintance of a most good-natured cicerone. For Mr. Ferrier himself has many meritorious points about him; and, above all, he can display a 'greatness of gusto.' He writes with a smack of enjoyment. It may be said that he smokes with Sir Valentine, eats with Cope, and dozes with Dr. Wilbraham. He holds up the long tumbler, and listens luxuriously to the clinking of the ice in a hock and seltzer. Mr. Ferrier, with this enviable quality on his side, among others, has only to try for more compression and solidity, and make his next book as good as the best parts of Mottiscliffe, to produce something worthy of himself."¹

1. Stevenson, Review of Mottiscliffe

Fielding

Fielding is "easy, generous, witty, debauched, a favorite in the tap-room and the hunting field, yet withal a man of a high practical intelligence, a distinguished public servant, an ornament of the bench, and, with all his faults, undeniably a gentleman."¹ And the question which exercises Stevenson on this last point, as was brought out in the section on character, is why Fielding could not represent a gentleman in his novels.

"In Tom Jones, with its voluminous bulk and troops of characters, there is no shadow of a gentleman, for Allworthy is only ink and paper. In Joseph Andrews, I fear I have always confined my reading to the parson; and Mr. Adams, delightful as he is, has no pretension to the genteel. In Amelia we find some gentlefolk; Booth and Dr. Harrison will pass in a crowd, I dare not say they will do more."²

The characteristic of Fielding which most interests Stevenson is that which was referred to in the chapter on setting. It is Fielding's failure to realize that the novel has a much wider scope than the drama, and that it can include many elements and effects which the drama is forced to leave out. His interest, like the playwright's, centers exclusively on the human actors in his novels, and he counts for nothing the landscape, the background, and the spirit of the times which play such an important role in Hugo's romances.

1. Stevenson, Some Gentlemen in Fiction
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"Fielding, although he had recognized that the novel was nothing else than an epic in prose, wrote in the spirit not of the epic, but of the drama."¹

Stevenson makes no reference to Joseph Andrews besides that already quoted to the effect that his reading in that book never extends beyond the "delightful" parson. Tom Jones is a novel "of which the respectable profess that they could stand the dulness if it were not so blackguardly, and the more honest admit they could stand the blackguardism if it were not so dull."² Amelia, to him, is as excellent a book as Tom Jones is a bad one, and he is at a loss to understand why the world should base Fielding's renown on the latter.

"It is one of the curiosities of literature that Fielding, who wrote one book that was engaging, truthful, kind, and clean, and another book that was dirty, dull, and false, should be spoken of, the world over, as the author of the second and not the first, as the author of Tom Jones, not of Amelia.³

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Flaubert

"I read over again Flaubert's Tentation de St. Antoine; it struck me a good deal at first, but this second time it has fetched me immensely. I am but just done with it, so you will know the large proportion of salt to take with my present statement, that it's the finest thing I ever read! Of course, it isn't that; it's full of longuers, and is not quite 'redd up,' as we say in Scotland, not quite articulated; but there are splendid things in it."1

Anatole France

"I received from you a book by a man by the name of Anatole France. Why should I disguise it. I have no use for Anatole. He writes very prettily, and then afterwards?"2

"By the way, you sent me long ago a work by Anatole France, which I confess I did not taste. Since then I have made the acquaintance of the Abbé Coignard, and have become a faithful adorer. I don't think a better book was ever written."3

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1. Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, 1874
 2. Letter to Henry James, 1893
 3. Letter to Henry James, 1894

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Goethe

"I want you to like Charlotte. Werther himself has every feebleness and vice that could tend to make his suicide a most virtuous and commendable action; and yet I like Werther too--I don't know why, except that he has written the most delightful letters in the world. Note, by the way, the passage under date June 21st not far from the beginning: it finds a voice for a great deal of the dumb, uneasy, pleasurable longing that we have all had, times without number. I looked that up the other day for Roads, so I know the reference; but you will find it a garden of flowers from beginning to end. All through the passion keeps steadily rising, from the thunderstorm at the country-house --there was thunder in that story too--up to the last wild delirious interview; either Lotte was no good at all, or else Werther should have remained alive after that; either he knew his woman too well, or else he was precipitate. But an idiot like that is hopeless; and yet, he wasn't an idiot--I make reparation, and will offer eighteen pounds of best wax at his tomb. Poor devil! he was only the weakest--or, at least, a very weak strong man."1

"I know of no one whom I less admire than Goethe; he seems a very epitome of the sins of genius, breaking open the doors of private life, and wantonly wounding friends, in that crowning offence of Werther, and in his own character a mere pen-and-ink Napoleon, conscious of the rights and duties of superior talents as a Spanish inquisitor was conscious of the rights and duties of his office. And yet in his fine devotion to his art, in his honest and serviceable friendship for Schiller, what lessons are contained!"2

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1. Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, 1873
 2. Books Which Have Influenced Me

Hawthorne

Stevenson is of the opinion that Hawthorne is a far greater and better artist than Poe, but he sees a literary relationship between the two contemporary authors. Speaking of the two, he says,

"That there is a consanguinity, that the two saw the world in a fashion not altogether dissimilar, that some of the short stories of Hawthorne seem inspired by Poe, and some of Poe's short stories seem to be an echo of Hawthorne--all this is beyond question."¹

The only other reference to Hawthorne which Stevenson makes pertains to the unity of structure in some of his work.

"There is a unity, an unwavering creative purpose, about some at least of Hawthorne's romances, that impresses itself on the most indifferent reader: and the very restrictions and weaknesses of the man served perhaps to strengthen the vivid and single impression of his works."²

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1. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe
 2. Victor Hugo's Romances

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Hazlitt

Stevenson, a self-confessed egotist, admires Hazlitt for possessing the same rather questionable quality of egotism. Besides this characteristic which they share with a million other people, however, the two have another thing in common which makes for a strong bond: a love of the past, and a more or less sentimental inclination to dwell on its memories.

"If there is anything that delights me in Hazlitt, beyond the charm of style and the unconscious portrait of a vain and powerful spirit, which his works present, it is the loving and tender way in which he returns again to the memory of the past. When I read his essay On the Past and Future, every word seemed to be something I had said myself. It is for stirring the chord of memory, then, that I love Hazlitt's essays."¹

"I am in treaty with Bentley for a life of Hazlitt. You know I am a fervent Hazlittite; I mean regarding him as the English writer who has had the scantiest justice."²

"And here, lest you should think I am exaggerating, is Hazlitt's own confession, from his essay, On Going a Journey, which is so good that there should be a tax levied on all who have not read it. But we have no bravery nowadays, and, even in books, must all pretend to be as dull and foolish as our neighbors. It was not so with Hazlitt. I should wish to quote more, for though we are mighty fine fellows nowadays, we cannot write like Hazlitt."³

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1. A Retrospect
 2. Letter to P. G. Hammerton, 1881
 3. Walking Tours

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The point in the book which is especially

interesting is the manner in which the end of life is
 represented. The characters grow old and die off one by one,
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W. D. Howells

Stevenson thinks that Howells' artistic creed and convictions are extremely narrow, and sees in him a disposition essentially romantic which he suppresses behind the mask of realism.

"His own work and those of his pupils and masters singly occupy his mind; he is the bondsman, the zealot of his school; he dreams of an advance in art like what there is in science; he thinks of past things as radically dead; he thinks a form can be outlived: a strange immersion in his own history; a strange forgetfulness of the history of the race! Meanwhile, by a glance at his own works (could he see them with the eager eyes of his readers) much of this illusion would be dispelled. For while he holds all the poor little orthodoxies of the day--no poorer and no smaller than those of yesterday or to-morrow, poor, and small, indeed, only so far as they are exclusive--the living quality of much that he has done is of a contrary, I had almost said of a heretical, complexion. A man, as I read him, of an originally strong romantic bent--a certain glow of romance still resides in many of his books, and lends them their distinction. As by accident he runs out and revels in the exceptional; and it is then, as often as not, that his reader rejoices--justly, as I contend. For in all this excessive eagerness to be centrally human, is there not one central human thing that Mr. Howells is too often tempted to neglect: I mean himself? A poet, a finished artist, a man in love with the appearances of life, a cunning reader of the mind, he has other passions and aspirations than those he loves to draw. And why should he suppress himself and do such reverence to the Lemuel Barkers? The obvious is not of

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necessity the normal; fashion rules and deforms; the majority fall tamely into the contemporary shape, and thus attain, in the eyes of the true observer, only a higher power of insignificance; and the danger is lest, in seeking to draw the normal, a man should draw the null, and write the novel of society instead of the romance of man."¹

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1. Stevenson, A Humble Remonstrance

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Victor Hugo

Stevenson considers the novels of Victor Hugo extremely important in any study of the development of literary tendencies in the novel. Scott had introduced much new material into the novel; for one thing, he had tried to portray man, not in isolation, but as an integral part of his environment, molded and acted upon by forces outside of his will. But the individual interests which had exclusively occupied Fielding were still all-important in Scott's stories. Hugo not only followed Scott's revolutionary innovations, but brought them to such a culmination that in some of his novels our interest centers as much on the forces of nature or on an abstract principle as on the heroes themselves. And the greatest advance which Hugo made over Scott was in degree of self-consciousness, Stevenson thinks. Scott gave impetus to the new movement of the enfranchised imagination, but he was not aware of where it would lead; Hugo, on the other hand, wrote with his eyes open and a definite purpose in mind.

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1. Victor Hugo's Romances

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Hugo is no longer content with emphasizing the more or less accidental relations of man to man, and he is before himself the task of realizing in the language of romance, much of the investigation of our complicated lives.

Thus, Hugo writes "novels with a purpose," but, it will be remembered, they are not to be confused with the inferior type usually called by that name. In his romances, the moral significance is usually the basic principle, the guiding idea, on which the story is constructed, and is part and parcel of the general effect.

"If you could somehow despoil Les Miserables or Les Travailleurs of their distinctive lesson, you would find that the story had lost its interest and the book was dead."¹

With the purpose of discovering this moral significance, or epical value, which he thinks is present in Hugo's works, Stevenson studies five of Hugo's romances: Notre Dame de Paris, Les Miserables, Les Travailleurs de la Mer, L'Homme Qui Rit, and Quatre Vingt Treize.

Notre Dame de Paris

The moral end for which Hugo strives in this is "to denounce the external fatality that hangs over men in the form of foolish and inflexible superstition," but, in Stevenson's opinion, it has very little connection with the artistic conception and it is very poorly developed, while the artistic conception is handled with the utmost skill.

1. Victor Hugo's Romances

Victor Segalen

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I. Victor Hugo's Romance

There is more melodrama in this book than in the others, Stevenson thinks, more of "that sort of brutality, that useless insufferable violence to the feelings" which is not to be condoned. As a reader, Stevenson finds Esmeralda's passion for the indifferent archer disagreeable, and he cannot bring himself to forgive Hugo for having included the scene where the unfortunate girl betrays herself and her mother by calling out to the archer. Moreover, although there is not much here of the extravagance that Hugo later employed, there are yet "words, thoughts, and incidents that defy belief and alienate the sympathies."¹ For one thing, Stevenson absolutely refuses to believe that Quasimodo, or anybody else, for that matter, ever rode upon a bell.

Les Miserables

No similar black marks can be checked against this romance. In this, Stevenson thinks, Hugo comes the nearest to literary restraint. Moreover, it is vastly superior to Notre Dame de Paris because here the moral end and the artistic conception go hand in hand.

"It is the moral intention of this great novel to awaken us a little, if it may be--for such awakenings are unpleasant--to the great cost of this

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society that we enjoy and profit by, to the labor and sweat of those who support the litter, civilization, in which we ourselves are so smoothly carried forward. It is to something of all this that Victor Hugo wishes to open men's eyes in Les Miserables; and this moral lesson is worked out in masterly coincidence with the artistic effect. The deadly weight of civilization to those who are below presses sensibly on our shoulders as we read."¹

Even though the design is far from being cheerful, Stevenson finds the book full of life and light, and he considers the character of the Bishop one of the most pleasant things in modern literature.

"Take it for all in all, there are few books in the world that can be compared with it. There is as much calm and serenity as Hugo has ever attained to; the melodramatic coarsenesses that disfigured Notre Dame are no longer present. There is certainly much that is painfully improbable; and again the story is a little too well constructed; it produces on us the effect of a puzzle, and we grow incredulous as we find that every character fits again and again into the plot, and is, like the child's cube, serviceable on six faces; things are not so well arranged in life as all that comes to. Some of the digressions, also, seem out of place, and do nothing but interrupt and irritate. But when all is said, the book remains of masterly conception and of masterly development, full of pathos, full of truth, full of a high eloquence."²

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Les Travailleurs de la Mer

The purpose of this book is to show man's perpetual struggle against the elements. And here again, Stevenson thinks, the artistic effect and the moral lesson are one.

Stevenson compares the isolation of Gilliat, the hero of this book, with that of Robinson Crusoe. As he says, Robinson Crusoe was written before art had learned to deal with what lies outside the human will, and a comparison of the treatment of nature in the two books, besides being highly instructive, shows how far afield the novel has wandered.

"Crusoe was one sole centre of interest in the midst of a nature utterly dead and utterly unrealized by the artist; but this is not how we feel with Gilliat; we feel that he is opposed by a dark coalition of forces, that an immense animosity surrounds him; we are the witnesses of the terrible warfare that he wages with the silent inclemency of phenomena going their own way. Just as we recognize Gilliat for the hero, we recognize, as implied by this indifference of things, this direction of forces to some purpose outside our purposes, yet another character who may almost take rank as the villain of the novel, and the two face up to one another blow for blow, feint for feint, until, in the storm, they fight it epically out, and Gilliat remains the victor:--a victor, however, who has still to encounter the octopus. I need say nothing of the grewsome, repulsive excellence of that famous scene; it will be enough to remind the reader that Gilliat is in pursuit of a crab when he is himself assaulted by the devil fish, and that this, in its own way, is the last touch to the inner significance of the book; here, indeed, is the true position of man in the universe."¹

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"It is here that we shall find the famous 'first of the fourth,' and many English words that may be comprehensible perhaps in Paris. It is here that we learn that 'laird' in Scotland is the same title as 'Lord' in England. Here, also, is an account of a Highland soldier's equipment, which we recommend to the lovers of genuine fun."¹

L'Homme Qui Rit

The purpose of this novel, which is to "denounce the aristocratic principle as it was exhibited in England," is much more satiric than that of the other novels, in Stevenson's opinion, and is the explanation for much that is unpleasant in the book.

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absurdities, discourage the reader at the outset, and it needs an effort to take it as seriously as it deserves. And yet when we judge it deliberately, it will be seen that, here again, the story is admirably adapted to the moral."¹

Stevenson thinks that Hugo attains a quality in the narration that is more intimate than is customary with him, but the book is "wordy" and sometimes "wearisome" in spite of that. Also he finds here the beginning of "an abuse of conventional conversation, such as may be quite pardonable in the drama where needs must, but is without excuse in the romance."²

Quatre Vingt Treize

Stevenson is of the opinion that the episode of the mother and children is equal to the best that Hugo has ever written, and that the chapter in the second volume entitled "Sein guerri, coeur saignant" is true tragedy, but he considers the Tocsin scene bad. Moreover, the book contains an even greater abuse of conventional dialogue than is found in L'Homme Que Rit, and the author has put much into the mouths of his characters which should have been said by him if it was to be said at all.

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"This question meets with one answer after another during the course of the book, and yet seems to remain undecided to the end. And something in the same way, although one character, or one set of characters, after another comes to the front and occupies our attention for the moment, we never identify our interest with any of these temporary heroes nor regret them after they are withdrawn. We soon come to regard them as special cases of a general law; what we really care for is something that they only imply and body forth to us. Gauvain and Cimourdain pass away, and we regard them no more than the lost armies of which we find the cold statistics in military annals; what we regard is what remains behind; it is the principle that put these men where they were, that filled them for a while with heroic inspiration, and has the power, now that they are fallen, to inspire others with the same courage. The interest of the novel centres about revolutionary France; just as the plot is an abstract historical force. And this has been done, not as it would have been done before, by the cold and cumbersome machinery of allegory, but with bold, straightforward realism, dealing only with the objective materials of art, and dealing with them so masterfully that the palest abstractions of thought come before us, and move our hopes and fears, as if they were the young men and maidens of customary romance."¹

Thus, Quatre Vingt Treize, according to Stevenson, proves beyond a doubt that the innovations, the departures from the traditional rules of romance, which Hugo had introduced into the earlier books, were not accidental. Throughout, the author was searching for a new set of effects, and this last novel, Quatre Vingt Treize, is the culmination and the proof.

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"If you look back at the five books, you will be astonished at the freedom with which the original purposes of story-telling have been laid aside and passed by. Where are now the two lovers who descended the main watershed of all the Waverley novels, and all the novels that have tried to follow in their wake. Sometimes they are almost lost sight of before the solemn isolation of a man against the sea and sky, as in Les Travailleurs; sometimes, as in Les Miserables, they merely figure for a while, as a beautiful episode in the epic of oppression; sometimes they are entirely absent, as in Quatre Vingt Treize. There is no hero in Notre Dame: in L'Homme Qui Rit it is a monster: in Les Miserables it is an old man: in Quatre Vingt Treize it is the revolution. So we have elemental forces occupying nearly as large a place, playing (so to speak) nearly as important a role, as the man, Gilliat, who opposes and overcomes them. So we find the fortunes of a nation put upon the stage with as much vividness as ever before the fortunes of a village maiden or a lost heir. This is a long way that we have travelled: between such work and the work of Fielding is there not, indeed, a great gulf in thought and sentiment?"¹

The following paragraphs of high praise give us a clear conception of Stevenson's estimate of Hugo's gifts and weaknesses.

"Romance is a language in which many persons learn to speak with a certain appearance of fluency; but there are few who can bend it to any practical need, few who can ever be said to express themselves in it. Hugo occupies a high place among the few."²

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"And in all this generalization of interest, we never miss those small humanities that are at the opposite pole of excellence in art; and while we admire the intellect that could see life thus largely, we are touched with another sentiment for the tender heart that slipped the piece of gold into Cosette's sabot. ... The author has shown a power of just subordination hitherto unequalled; and as, in reaching forward to one class of effects, he has not been forgetful or careless of the other, his work is more nearly complete work, and his art, with all its imperfections, deals more comprehensively with the materials of life than that of any of his otherwise more sure and masterly predecessors."¹

"These five volumes would have made a very great fame for any writer, and yet they are but one facade of the monument that Hugo has erected to his genius. Everywhere we find somewhat the same greatness, somewhat the same infirmities. In his poems and plays there are the same unaccountable protervities that have already astonished us in the romances. There, too, is the same feverish strength, welding the fiery iron of his idea under forge-hammer repetitions--an emphasis that is somehow akin to weakness--a strength that is a little epileptic. He stands so far above all his contemporaries, and so incomparably excels them in richness, breadth, variety, and moral earnestness, that we almost feel as if he had a sort of right to fall oftener and more heavily than others; but this does not reconcile us to seeing him profit by the privileges so freely. We like to have, in our great men, something that is above question; we like to place an implicit faith in them, and see them always on the platform of their greatness; and this, unhappily, cannot be with Hugo. As Heine said long ago,

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types of novels, and his is a genius somewhat deformed; but, deformed as it is, we accept it gladly; we shall have the wisdom to see where his foot slips, but we shall have the justice also to recognize in him one of the greatest artists of our generation, and, in many ways, one of the greatest artists of time. If we look back, yet once, upon these five romances, we see blemishes such as we can lay to the charge of no other man in the number of the famous; but to what other man can we attribute such sweeping innovations, such a new and significant presentment of the life of men, such an amount, if we merely think of the amount, of equally consummate performance?"¹

Henry James

Reference has already been made in some detail, under the discussion of the novel, to the great divergence between James' and Stevenson's opinions concerning the aims and qualities of the novel. The most important points on which they differ, to repeat them briefly for the sake of clearness and completeness, are that James thinks the novelist vies with life in presenting a picture apparently without rearrangement, while Stevenson insists that the novel is merely a substitute for life and that the novelist gains significance in so far as he rearranges the materials of life to suit his immediate design; that James acknowledges no distinctions whatsoever among novels, except that between the good and the bad, while Stevenson asserts that there are certain different

1. Victor Hugo's Romances

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types of novels, and that, according to the type of novel he has in mind, the novelist will, and should, vary his method of presentment. And, it will be remembered, although James insists that there is no such thing as a novel of character, Stevenson assures him that it is the sort of novel which he, James, usually writes. Speaking of this type of novel which, obviously, subordinates the other elements of narrative to a detailed study of character, Stevenson says,

"Here Mr. James will recognise the note of much of his own work; he treats for the most part, the statics of character, studying it at rest or only gently moved; and, with his usual delicate and just artistic instinct, he avoids those stronger passions which would deform the attitudes he loves to study, and change his sitters from the humourists of ordinary life to the brute forces and bare types of more emotional moments. In his recent Author of Beltraffio, so just in conception, so nimble and neat in workmanship, strong passion is indeed employed; but observe that it is not displayed. I trust no reader will suppose me guilty of undervaluing this little masterpiece. I mean merely that it belongs to one marked class of novel."¹

In spite of these differences of opinion, Stevenson was one of James' most fervent admirers. Even when he disagrees most strongly with his views he pays him a tribute by calling him an artist "so precise of outline, so cunning of fence, so scrupulous of finish."² The two authors were constant corres-

1. A Humble Remonstrance

2. Ibid.

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pondents from the time when Stevenson first went to the South Seas to his death, and the following excerpts--criticism of works by James--are taken from letters which Stevenson wrote to him over a period years. Although their differences in opinion keep cropping up, it is amusing to hear Stevenson enthusiastically averring time and again that this or that is absolutely the best thing which James ever wrote.

"I am rejoiced indeed to hear you speak so kindly of my work; rejoiced and surprised. I seem to myself a very rude, left-handed countryman; not fit to read, far less complimented, by a man so accomplished, so adroit, so craftsmanlike as you. You will happily never have cause to understand the despair with which a writer like myself considers (say) the park scene in Lady Barberina. Every touch surprises me by its intangible precision; and the effect when done, as light as a syllabub, as distinct as a picture, fills me with envy. Each man among us prefers his own aim, and I prefer mine; but when we come to speak of performance, I recognise myself, compared with you, to be a lout and slouch of the first water. Where we differ, both as to the design of stories and the delineation of character, I begin to lament. Of course, I am not so dull as to ask you to desert your walk; but could you not, in one novel, to oblige a sincere admirer, and to enrich his shelves with a beloved volume, could you not, and might you not, cast your characters in a mold a little more abstract and academic (dear Mrs. Pennyman had already, among your other work, a taste of what I mean), and pitch the incidents, I do not say in any stronger, but in a slightly more emphatic key--as it were an episode from one of the old (so-called) novels of adventure? I fear you will not; and I suppose I must sighingly admit you to be right. And yet,

when I see, as it were, a book of Tom Jones handled with your exquisite precision and shot through with those sidelights of reflection in which you excel, I relinquish the dear vision with regrets. Think upon it."¹

"And second, and more important, as to the Princess Casamassima. Well, I think you are going to do it this time; I cannot, of course, foresee, but these two first numbers seem to me picturesque and sound and full of lineament, and very much a new departure. As for your young lady, she is all there; yes, sir, you can do low life, I believe. The prison was excellent; it was of that nature of touch that I sometimes achingly miss from your former work; with some of the grime, that is, and some of the emphasis of skeleton there is in nature. I pray you to take grime in a good sense; it need not be ignoble; dirt may have dignity; in nature it usually has; and your prison was imposing."²

"It may please you to know how our family has been employed. In the silence of the snow the afternoon lamp has lighted an eager fire-side group: my mother reading, Fanny, Lloyd, and I devoted listeners; and the work was really one of the best works I ever heard; and its author to be praised and honoured; and, in short, the name of it is Roderick Hudson, if you please. My dear James, it is very spirited and very sound, and very noble too. Hudson, Mrs. Hudson, Rowland, O, all first-rate; Rowland a very fine fellow; Hudson as good as he can stick, Mrs. H. his real born mother, a thing rarely managed in fiction. We are going to re-read Casamassima as a proper pendant. Sir, I think these two are your best, and care not who knows it. Perhaps it is a pang of

1. Letter to James, 1884
2. Ibid, 1885

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"It may please you to know how our family has been employed. In the silence of the snow the afternoon lamp has lighted an eager five-side group: my mother reading, Fanny, Lloyd, and I devoted listeners; and the work was really one of the best works I ever heard; and its author to be praised and honored; and, in short, the name of it is Robert Hood, if you please. My dear James, it is very spirited and very sound, and very noble too. Hood, Mrs. Hood, Rowland, O, all first-rate; Rowland a very fine fellow; Hood as good as he can stick, Mrs. H. his real born mother, a thing rarely managed in fiction. We are going to re-read Cassamassina as a proper pendant. Sir, I think these two are your best, and care not who knows it. Perhaps it is a pang of

causeless honesty, perhaps I hope it will set a value on my praise of Roderick, perhaps it's a burst of the diabolic, but I must break out with the news that I can't bear the Portrait of a Lady. I read it all, and I wept too; but I can't stand your having written it; and I beg you will write no more of the like. Infra, sir; below you: I can't help it--it may be your favourite work, but in my eyes it's below you to write and me to read. I thought Roderick was going to be another such at the beginning; and I cannot describe my pleasure as I found it taking bones and blood, and looking out at me with a moved and human countenance, whose lineaments are written in my memory until my last of days."¹

"With what a torrent it has come at last! Up to now, what I like best is the first number of A London Life. You have never done anything better, and I don't know if perhaps you have ever done anything so good as the girl's outburst: tip-top. I have been preaching your later works in your native land. I had to present the Beltraffio volume to Low, and it has brought him to his knees; he was amazed at the first part of Georgina's Reasons, although (like me) not so well satisfied with Part II. It is annoying to find the American public as stupid as the English, but they will waken up in time."²

(Stevenson had been reading James' book entitled Lesson of the Master; Adela Chart is the heroine of the second story in that collection, called The Marriage.)

"From this perturbed and hunted being, expect but a line, and that line shall be but a whoop for Adela. O, she's delicious, delicious; I could live and die with Adela--die, rather the better of the two; you never did a straighter thing, and

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1. Letter to James, 1887
2. Letter to James, 1889

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Kipling

never will. No person now alive has beaten Adela."¹

Kipling was only in the late twenties when Stevenson

died, so that Stevenson with great joy; your little boy is admirable; why is there no little boy like that unless he hails from the Great Republic?"²

promise, but thinks that he writes much too fast.

"This mood of wholesale impatience with all fiction and all verging on it, and war, will be my excuse for not having read your (doubtless) charming work of fiction. The revolving year will bring me round to it; and I know, when fiction shall begin to feel a little solid to me again, that I shall love it, because it's James."³

"How exquisite is your character of the critic in Essays in Longing. I doubt if you have done any single thing so satisfying as a piece of style and of insight."⁴

... these excellent sentences and flying leaves of verse? I look on, I admire, I rejoice for myself; but in a kind of ambition we all have for our tongue and literature I am wounded. If I had this man's fertility and courage, it seems to me I could heave a pyramid. Well, we begin to be the old fogies now; and it was high time something rose to take our places. Certainly Kipling has the gifts; the fairy godmothers were all tipsy at his christening: what will he do with them?"¹

"Kipling is too clever to live."²

"I am now reduced to two of my contemporaries, you and Barrie--O, and Kipling--you and Barrie and Kipling are now my Moses Threes. And with Kipling, as

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1. Letter to James, 1891
 2. Ibid., 1891
 3. Ibid., 1893 Henry James, 1891
 4. Ibid., 1893

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"I read The Pupil the other day
with great joy; your little boy is admirable;
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 2. *Ibid.*, 1891
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Kipling was only in the late twenties when Stevenson died, so that Stevenson did not really know very much about him. He considers him a young man of great talent and great promise, but thinks that he writes much too fast.

"Kipling is by far the most promising young man who has appeared since --ahem--I appeared. He amazes me by his precocity and various endowments. But he alarms me by his copiousness and haste. He should shield his fire with both hands 'and draw up all his strength and sweetness in one ball.' So the critics have been saying to me; but I was never capable of--and surely never guilty of--such a debauch of production. At this rate his works will soon fill the habitable globe; and surely he was armed for better conflicts than these succinct sketches and flying leaves of verse? I look on, I admire, I rejoice for myself; but in a kind of ambition we all have for our tongue and literature I am wounded. If I had this man's fertility and courage, it seems to me I could heave a pyramid. Well, we begin to be the old fogies now; and it was high time something rose to take our places. Certainly Kipling has the gifts; the fairy godmothers were all tipsy at his christening: what will he do with them?"¹

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"I am now reduced to two of my contemporaries, you and Barrie--O, and Kipling--you and Barrie and Kipling, are now my Muses Three. And with Kipling, as

you know, there are reservations to be made."¹

Marcus Aurelius

Stevenson mentions the Meditations as one of those books which have had a great influence on him.

"The dispassionate gravity, the noble forgetfulness of self, the tenderness of others, that are there expressed and were practised on so great a scale in the life of its writer, make this book a book quite by itself. No one can read it and not be moved. Yet it scarcely or rarely appeals to the feelings--those very mobile, those not very trusty parts of man. Its address lies further back: its lesson comes more deeply home; when you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself; it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue."²

"There are but two writers who have touched the South Seas with any genius, both Americans: Melville and C. W. Stoddard; and at the christening of the first and greatest, some influential fairy must have been neglected: 'He shall be able to see,' 'He shall be able to tell,' 'He shall be able to charm,' said the friendly godmothers, 'But he shall not be able to hear,' exclaimed the last."³

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1. Letter to Henry James, 1892
 2. Books Which Have Influenced Me

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Marryat

The only reference to Marryat which Stevenson makes is not exactly commendatory.

"Don't read Marryat's Pirate anyhow; it is written in sand with a salt-spoon: arid, feeble, vain, tottering production. But then we're not always all there. He was all somewhere else on that trip. It's damnable, Henley. I don't go much on The Sea-Cook; but, Lord, it's a little fruitier than The Pirate by Cap'n Marryat."1

Herman MelvilleCharles Warren Stoddard

In the two references to Melville which I have found, Stevenson, curiously enough in view of the fact that he ordinarily is no precisian, cannot get over the fact that Melville has led his readers astray by incorrectly calling the Hapaa tribe Hapar.

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1. Letter to W. E. Henley, 1881
2. Stevenson, The South Seas

"Our admirable friend, Herman Melville, of whom, since I could judge, I have thought more than ever, had no ear for languages whatever: his Hapar tribe should be Hapaa."¹

Meredith

Stevenson confines his criticism of Meredith's work to The Ordeal of Richard Feverel and The Egoist. The great blot on the former in his estimation, as it was pointed out, is that it ends unhappily when there is no reason inherent in the story for such an ending. On the other hand, "the last interview between Lucy and Richard Feverel is pure drama; more than that, it is the strongest scene, since Shakespeare, in the English language."²

He is ungrudging in his praise of The Egoist in spite of the fact that he thinks that as a rule satire, "the angry picture of human faults," is not great art. The point is that this book is a peculiar kind of satire, and stands in a class by itself.

"It is a satire of a singular quality, which tells you nothing of that obvious mote, which is engaged from first to last with that invisible beam. It is yourself that is hunted down; these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision. A

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1. Letter to E. L. Burlingame, 1890
 2. A Gossip on Romance

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young friend of Mr. Meredith's came to him in an agony. 'This is too bad of you,' he cried. 'Willoughby is me!' 'No, my dear fellow,' said the author; 'he is all of us.' I have read The Egoist five or six times myself, and I mean to read it again; for I am like the young friend of the anecdote-- I think Willoughby an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself."¹

"Talking of Meredith, I have just re-read for the third and fourth time The Egoist. When I shall have read it the sixth or seventh, I begin to see I shall know about it. You will be astonished when you come to re-read it; I had no idea of the matter--human, red matter--he has contrived to plug and pack into that strange and admirable book. Willoughby is, of course, a pure discovery; a complete set of nerves, not heretofore examined, and yet running all over the human body--a suit of nerves. Clara is the best girl ever I saw anywhere. Vernon is almost as good. The manner and the faults of the book greatly justify themselves on further study. Only Dr. Middleton does not hang together; and Ladies Busshe and Culmer sont des monstruosités. Vernon's conduct makes a wonderful odd contrast with Daniel Deronda's. I see more and more that Meredith is built for immortality."²

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1. Books Which Have Influenced Me
 2. Letter to W. E. Henley, 1882

Montaigne

Montaigne figures prominently among those few authors who form the inner circle of Stevenson's literary intimates. He has never read the whole of Montaigne, he says, but he does not like to be very long without delving into his work, and his pleasure in what he reads never decreases.

"A book which has been very influential upon me fell early into my hands, and so may stand first, though I think its influence was only sensible later on, and perhaps still keeps growing, for it is a book not easily outlived; the Essais of Montaigne. That temperate and genial picture of life is a great gift to place in the hands of persons of to-day; they will find in these smiling pages a magazine of heroism and wisdom, all of an antique strain; they will have their 'linen decencies' and excited orthodoxies fluttered, and will (if they have any gift of reading) perceive that these have not been fluttered without some excuse and ground of reason; and (again if they have any gift of reading) they will end by seeing that this old gentleman was in a dozen ways a nobler view of life, than they or their contemporaries."¹

1. Books Which Have Influenced Me

'any man may well lose patience to think of
 looking for the best of a bad
 and I look at these various and most
 Georgian sentimental which pages at large
 in all descriptive passages, and further
 such extravagant poetry and reasoning that
 one is never right and whether it be
 in reason or faith. Some of it is false
 time, I have said; but for the most part
 the uncontrolled expression of the man's
 high style. In any other writer, however
 out into a fervent, "What God has chosen
 did at least, we should be not a little
 exalted as to his style; but in Wilson
 we like the extravagance, because we
 understand the man, and in all good self
 enough with his religious and leading ideas.
 For it is mostly literature; as most
 a sort of finished writing, as if prepared
 to do; and the fiction of many, for
 short-hand writing in the art of literature
 seems almost necessary to explain the
 existence of the book.

"In Wilson's edition we find the
 several parts of their best work, and
 from beginning to end, their meeting and
 finished and completed by Thomas and
 Alfred. Both are always at least in
 character; neither is always at least high;
 and the shepherd is always the shepherd.
 For how is it possible to praise a
 subject in creation but in terms of himself?
 We are the last expression of sophisticated
 character; as once a poet, a journalist, a
 politician, and a shepherd; each in
 between them and the daily language in
 things literary; and in things moral,
 occupying all sorts of intermediate
 relations between a pure light and a
 the proper. It is were better to say
 words of so many things a strain, we might
 classify him as a "responsible man."

Christopher North

The following passages refer to the edition of Wilson's Noctes Ambrosianae which was edited and arranged by John Skelton. Stevenson approves Skelton's aim which was to select what is of permanent interest out of all that is merely local, temporary, and of questionable humor. He thinks that few people living during the last quarter of the nineteenth century would have either the time or the patience, or, for that matter, the interest, to wade through the voluminous work. So that by abridging the work, Skelton has rendered a great service to Wilson and erected a permanent monument to his fame.

"And this book is not only welcome because it takes us on a visit to Wilson when he is in his best vein, but because Wilson in all his veins is the antidote or at least the antithesis of much contemporary cant. Here is a book full of the salt of youth; a red-hot shell of animal spirits calculated, if anybody reads it, to set up a fine conflagration among the dry heather of present-day Phariseeism. Touch it as you will, it gives out shrewd galvanic shocks, which may perhaps brighten and shake up this smoke-dried and punctilious generation. Look at the profound sensuality, which breaks out in the praise of all sorts of exercise, and gloats, through near one-half the pages, over the details of eating and drinking. Look at the grand inhumanity; see how they laugh over the two bagmen lost in the snow, for no better reason than that they were Cockneys, and wore false collars something delicately starched; or listen to them declaring that

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'any man may well lose patience to think of fools being sorry for the death of a fox.' And then look at that curious and most Scottish enthusiasm which rages at large in all descriptive passages, and inspires such extravagant poetry and reasoning that one is never rightly sure whether it be in jest or earnest. Some of it is false fire, I dare say; but by far the most is the uncontrollable expression of the man's high spirits. If any other writer broke out into a fervent 'Thank God that Nelson died at sea!' we should be not a little exercised as to his sanity; but in Wilson we like the extravagance, because we understand the man. And it all goes well enough with his copious and headlong style. For it is scarcely literature; at most, a sort of inspired talking, as it purports to be: and the fiction of Gurney the short-hand writer in the ear of Dionysius seems almost necessary to explain the existence of the book."¹

"In Skelton's edition we find the immortal trio at their best throughout. From beginning to end, their meetings are inspired and sanctified by Bacchus and Apollo. North can always lay aside his crutch; Tickler is always six feet high; and the Shepherd is always the Shepherd. For how is it possible to praise that adorable creation but in terms of himself? He is the last expression of sophisticated rusticity; at once a poet, a journalist, a Scotchman, and a shepherd; oscillating between Burns and the Daily Telegraph in things literary; and, in things moral, occupying all sorts of intermediate stations between a prize fighter and Peden the Prophet. If it were lawful to marry words of so incongruous a strain, we might classify him as a Presbyterian Faun."²

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1. The Comedy of the Noctes Ambrosianae
 2. Ibid.

"Wilson looked upon life with the positive acceptation of a man in excellent health; his heart never seems to have failed him over anything, however squalid or sad. The man who wrote the Alderman's death, or the Shepherd's commentary over the oysters was certainly of no very dainty stomach. But it was to this same unscrupulous catholicity of taste that we owe masterpieces (after their fashion) like the dog-fight in the Guse Dubs, the execution of the mutineer, or those scathing pictures of depravity with which the Shepherd silences some sentimental aspirations after the improvement of the species."¹

Obermann

Stevenson has a very definite grudge against Matthew Arnold for having led him to read Obermann whom Stevenson considers an evil influence on youth.

"The day is perhaps not far off when people will begin to count Moll Flanders ay, or The Country Wife, more wholesome and more pious diet than these guide-books to consistent egoism. To believe in immortality is one thing, but it is first needful to believe in life."²

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 2. Old Mortality

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Penn

The enthusiastically appreciative passage below refers to a book Fruits of Solitude.

"Here it is, with the mark of a San Francisco bouquiniste. And if ever in all my 'human conduct' I have done a better thing to any fellow creature than handing on to you this sweet, dignified, and wholesome book, I know I shall hear of it on the last day. To write a book like this were impossible; at least one can hand it on--with a wrench--one to another. My wife cries out and my own heart misgives me, but still here it is. I could scarcely better prove myself yours affectionately. I hope, if you get this far, you will know what an invaluable present I have made you. Even the copy was dear to me, printed in the colony that Penn established, and carried in my pocket all about the San Francisco streets, read in street cars and ferry-boats, and found in all times and places a peaceful and sweet companion. But I hope, when you shall have reached this note, my gift will not have been in vain; for while just now we are so busy and intelligent, there is not the man living, no, nor recently dead, that could put, with so lovely a spirit, so much honest, kind wisdom into words."¹

1. Letter to H. F. Brown, 1881

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Pepys

"There is perhaps no other instance so remarkable of the desire of man for publicity and an enduring name. The greatness of his life was open, yet he longed to communicate its smallness also; and, while contemporaries bowed before him, he must buttonhole posterity with the news that his periwig was once alive with nits. Not for his own sake only, but as a character in a unique position, endowed with a unique talent, and shedding a unique light upon the lives of the mass of mankind, he is surely worthy of prolonged and patient study."¹

Stevenson has given us as graphic and comprehensive, and, incidentally, as well written, a picture of Pepys as one could hope to find anywhere. It is worth including for the sheer pleasure of reading it.

"The whole world, town or country, was to Pepys a garden of Armida. Wherever he went, his steps were winged with the most eager expectation; whatever he did, it was done with the most lively pleasure. An insatiable curiosity in all the shows of the world and all the secrets of knowledge, filled him brimful of the longing to travel, and supported him in the toils of study. If he found himself rusty in his Latin grammar, he must fall to it like a schoolboy. He must always be doing something agreeable, and by preference, two agreeable things at once. In his house he had a box of carpenter's tools, two dogs, an eagle, a canary, and a blackbird that whistled tunes, lest, even in that full life, he should chance upon an empty moment. If he had to wait for a dish of poached eggs, he must put in the time by playing on the flageolet; if a sermon

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were dull, he must read or divert his mind with sly advances on the nearest women. When he walked, it must be with a book in his pocket to beguile the way in case the nightingales were silent; and even along the streets of London, with so many pretty faces to be spied for and dignitaries to be saluted, his trail was marked by little debts 'for wine, pictures, etc....' the true headmark of a life intolerant of any joyless passage. Dearly as he loved to talk, he could not enjoy nor shine in a conversation when he thought himself unsuitably dressed. Dearly as he loved eating, he 'knew not how to eat alone;' pleasure for him must heighten pleasure; and the eye and ear must be flattered like the palate ere he avow himself content. But nothing could divert him from his aim in life; his remedy in care was the same as his delights in prosperity; it was with pleasure and with pleasure only, that he sought to drive out sorrow; and, whether he was jealous of his wife or skulking from a bailiff, he would equally take refuge in the theatre. Equally pleased with a watch, a coach, a piece of meat, a tune upon the fiddle, or a fact in hydrostatic, Pepys was pleased yet more by the beauty, the worth, the mirth, or the mere scenic attitude in life of his fellow-creatures. He shows himself throughout a sterling humanist. Indeed, he who loves himself, not in idle vanity, but with a plenitude of knowledge, is the best equipped of all to love his neighbors. It does not matter what quality a person had: Pepys can appreciate and love him for it."¹

Obviously, Stevenson has no illusions concerning Pepys' integrity of character on the moral side.

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he has inherited a good estate, when he has seemingly got nothing but a lawsuit; and is pleased to be thought liberal when he knows that he has been mean."1

"In a dozen ways, Pepys was quite strong enough to please himself without regard for others; but his positive qualities were not coextensive with the field of conduct; and in many parts of life he followed, with gleeful precision, in the footprints of the contemporary Mrs. Grundy. In morals, particularly, he lived by countenance of others; felt a slight from another more keenly than a meanness in himself; and then first repented when he was found out."2

Stevenson feels fairly certain that Pepys had entertained the thought that someone might ultimately decipher his manuscript and publish it, but he is just as certain that this nebulous hope was not Pepys' first thought nor his main concern in writing the diary, and that it did not influence one word which appears within its pages. From first to last, Pepys' diary was a private pleasure, a cherished secret which gave zest to his life. He kept the diary because he was so taken up, so enamored one might say, with his own personality and character that he wanted to record his slightest experience for future reference in later years.

"In our tender years we still preserve a freshness of surprise at our prolonged existence; events make an impression out of all proportion to their

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"In our tender years we still preserve a freshness of surprise at our prolonged existence; events make an impression out of all proportion to their

most infinitesimal consequence; we are unspeakably touched by our own past adventures, and look forward to our future personality with sentimental interest. It was something of this, I think, that clung to Pepys. Although not sentimental in the abstract, he was sweetly sentimental about himself. His own past clung about his heart, an ever-green. Nor Hazlitt nor Rousseau had a more romantic passion for their past, although at times they might express it more romantically. But, to be quite in sympathy with Pepys, we must return once more to the experience of children. I can remember to have written, in the fly-leaf of more than one book, the date and the place where I then was; these were jottings for my future self; if I should chance on such a note in after years, I thought it would cause me a particular thrill to recognize myself across the intervening distance. Indeed, I might come upon them now, and not be moved one tittle--which shows that I have comparatively failed in life, and grown older than Samuel Pepys. For in the Diary we can find more than one such note of perfect childish egotism; as when he explains that his candle is going out, 'which makes me write thus slobberingly.' Such passages are not to be misunderstood. The appeal to Samuel Pepys years hence is unmistakable. He desires that dear, though unknown, gentleman keenly to realize his predecessor; to remember why a passage was uncleanly written. The man, you will perceive, was making reminiscences--a sort of pleasure by ricochet, which comforts many in distress, and turns some others into sentimental libertines: and the whole book, if you will but look at it in that way, is seen to be a work of art to Pepys own address."¹

On the whole, Stevenson is very tolerant with Pepys for all his weaknesses and frailties, and in spite of that almost "unintelligent sincerity" which makes him record the

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most infinitesimal details of all that he did, said, thought, or suffered. And not only is Stevenson tolerant, but he champions him with the gesture of one indulgently patting a child on the head.

"It may be said that we all of us write such a diary in airy characters upon our brain; but I fear there is a distinction to be made; I fear that as we render to our consciousness an account of our daily fortunes and behavior, we too often weave a tissue of romantic compliments and dull excuses; and even if Pepys were the ass and coward that men call him, we must take rank as sillier and more cowardly than he. The bald truth about oneself, what we are all too timid to admit when we are not too dull to see it, that was what he saw clearly and set down unsparingly."¹

Since Stevenson himself is such a devotee of perfection of style, what he has to say concerning Pepys' merits as a writer is rather surprising. He assures us that the Diary is very much worth reading in spite of the fact that it is not really well written.

"But a style which is indefatigably lively, telling, and picturesque through nine large volumes of everyday experience, which deals with the whole matter of a life, and yet is rarely wearisome, which condescends to the most fastidious particular, and yet sweeps all away in the forth-right current of the narrative,--such a style may be ungrammatical, it may be inelegant, it may be one tissue of mistakes, but it can never be devoid of merit. The first and

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the true function of the writer has been thoroughly performed throughout; and though the manner of his utterance be childishly awkward, the matter has been transformed and assimilated by his unfeigned interest and delight. The gusto of the man speaks out fierily after all these years. For the difference between Pepys and Shelley is one of quality but not of degree; in his sphere, Pepys felt as keenly, and his is the true prose of poetry--prose because the spirit of the man was narrow and earthly, but poetry because he was delightedly alive. Hence, in such a passage as this about the Epsom Shepherd, the result upon the reader's mind is entire conviction and unmingled pleasure. So, you feel, the thing fell out, not otherwise; and you would no more change it than you would change a sublimity of Shakespeare's, a homely touch of Bunyan's, or a favored reminiscence of your own."¹

Edgar Allan Poe

It is impossible, thinks Stevenson, to render Poe entirely sympathetic. At least it is not in his power to do so.

"I cannot find it in my heart to like either his portrait or his character; and though it is possible that we see him more or less refracted through the strange medium of his works, yet I do fancy that we can detect, alike in these, in his portrait, and in the facts of his life, a certain jarring note, a taint of something that we do not care to dwell upon or find a name for."²

Even though he is alienated by Poe's personality and morbid outlook on life, however, Stevenson asserts that he

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2. Stevenson, The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

shows the true story-teller's instinct in his earlier tales which are well conceived and carefully worked out.

"He knows the little nothings that make stories or mar them. He knows how to enhance the significance of any situation, and give colour and life to seeming irrelevant particulars. Admirable is the use he makes of the striking clock at Prince Proyero's feast, in The Mask of the Red Death. Each time the clock struck, it struck so loudly that the music and the dancing must cease perforce until it had made an end; as the hours ran on towards midnight, these pauses grew naturally longer; the maskers had the more time to think and look at one another, and their thoughts were none the more pleasant. Thus, as each hour struck there went a jar about the assemblage; until as the reader will remember, the end comes suddenly."¹

This method of thus creating a feeling of suspense and fear is quite legitimate and good narrative technique, according to Stevenson. Poe, by this well imagined device, has told his story to the best advantage; but there are times when his imaginings become fustian rather than sincere, times when he strives too much for effect.

"Sometimes he will take a high note falsetto; sometimes, by a sort of conjuring trick, get more out of his story than he has been able to put into it; and, while the whole garrison is really parading past us on the esplanade, continue to terrify us from the battlements with sham cannon and many fierce-looking shakos upon broomsticks."²

¹ Stevenson, The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

² Ibid. Stevenson, The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

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Unfortunately, not much that is good can be said of the last stories which Poe wrote. Besides their poor workmanship, they are full of a horror which is absolutely pointless and unforgivable according to Stevenson's tenets.

"There is no trace, in these, of the brilliant and often solid workmanship of his better moments. The stories are ill-conceived and written carelessly. There is much laughter; but it is a very ghastly sort of laughter at best--the laughter of those, in his own words, 'who laugh, but smile no more.' He seems to have lost respect for himself, for his art, and for his audience. When he dealt before with horrible images, he dealt with them for some definite enough occasion; but he scatters them abroad in these last tales with something of the ghoul or the furious lunatic that surpasses what one had imagined to oneself of Hell. He who could write King Pest had ceased to be a human being. For his own sake, and out of an infinite compassion for so lost a spirit, one is glad to think of him as dead."¹

Stevenson thinks that Poe's insight into "the debatable region between sanity and madness" is nothing short of incredible, but confesses that a little bit of Poe's madhouse atmosphere goes a long way with him.

"The Imp of the Perverse is an important contribution to morbid psychology; so, perhaps, is The Man of the Crowd; Berenice, too, for as horrible as it is, it touches a chord in one's own breast, though perhaps it is a chord that had better be left alone; and

1. Stevenson, The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

Unfortunately, not much that is good can be said of the last stories which Poe wrote. Besides their poor workmanship, they are full of a horror which is absolutely pointless and unforgivable according to Stevenson's remarks.

"There is no trace, in these, of the brilliant and often solid workmanship of his better moments. The stories are ill-conceived and written carelessly. There is much laughter; but it is a very ghastly sort of laughter at best--the laughter of those, in his own words, who laugh, but smile no more. He seems to have lost respect for himself, for his art, and for his audience. When he dealt before with horrible images, he dealt with them for some definite enough occasion; but he scatters them abroad in these last tales with something of the ghoul or the fortune teller's instinct that suggests what one has imagined to oneself of Hell. He who could write King Pest had ceased to be a human being. For his own sake, and out of an infinite compassion for so lost a spirit, one is glad to think of him as dead."

Stevenson thinks that Poe's insight into "the debatable region between sanity and madness" is nothing short of incredible, but confesses that a little bit of Poe's madhouse atmosphere goes a long way with him.

"The Imp of the Perverse is an important contribution to morbid psychology; so, perhaps, is The Man of the Crowd; likewise, too, for as horrible as it is, it touches a chord in one's own breast, though perhaps it is a chord that had better be left alone; and

the same idea recurs in The Tell-Tale Heart. Sometimes we can go with him the whole way with a good conscience; sometimes instead of saying, yes, this is how I should be if I were just a little more mad than ever I was--we can say frankly, this is what I am. But in general, his subtlety was more of a snare to him than anything else. And though it is delightful enough in the C. Auguste Dupin trilogy, yet one wearies in the long run of this strain of ingenuity; one begins to marvel at the absence of the good home-spun motives and sentiments that do the business of the everyday world; although the demonstrator is clever, and the cases instructive and probably unique, one begins to weary of going round this madhouse, and long for the society of some plain harmless person, with business habits and a frock coat, and nerves not much more shattered than the majority of his plain and harmless contemporaries."¹

As a critic, Stevenson is wary of praising Poe's works too highly for fear of inveigling unsuspecting readers into some unforgettable chambers of horror.

"It is Poe's merit to carry people away, and it is his besetting sin that he wants altogether such scrupulous honesty as guides and restrains the finished artist. He was, let us say it with all sorrow, not conscientious. Hunger was ever at his door, and he had too imperious a desire for what we call nowadays the sensational in literature. And thus the critic (if he be more conscientious than the man he is criticising) dare not greatly praise lest he should be thought to condone all that is unscrupulous and tinsel in these wonderful stories. They are to be praised by him in one way only--

1. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

one name that means in the Tel-Tala dialect
 sometimes we can go with the whole way
 with a good conscience; sometimes instead
 of saying, yes, this is now a should be
 it is just a little more and then ever
 I was a day further, this is what I
 was... but in general, his anxiety was
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 the ... because of this, we can
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 ingenuity; and begins to marvel at the
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 everyday world; although it is somewhat
 is the very, and the case is not
 probably because, and begins to worry at
 point from this because, and long for
 the society of some plain, honest person,
 who knows how to do a good deed, and
 never has more than a few words and
 majority of his plain and business
 conversation.

As a critic, Stevenson is very a realistic poet's work
 too highly in fact of revealing unsuspecting readers into
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 thus the critic (if he has more considerations
 than the way he is criticized) does not
 greatly praise but he should be honest
 to condemn all that is unattractive and
 limited in these wonderful stories. They
 are to be praised in that in one way only--

by recommending those that are least objectionable. If anyone wishes to be excited, let him read, under favorable circumstances, The Gold Bug, The Descent into the Maelstrom, The Oval Portrait, The Cask of Amontillado, and the three stories about C. Auguste Dupin, the philosophical detective. If he should then desire to read more, he may go on, but warily; there are trap-doors and spring-guns in these two volumes, there are gins and pitfalls; and the precipitate reader may stumble unawares upon some nightmare not easily to be forgotten."¹

"There is a duty to the living more important than any charity to the dead; and it would be criminal in the reviewer to spare one harsh word in the expression of his own loathing and horror lest, by its absence, another victim should be permitted to soil himself with the perusal of King Pest."²

1. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe
2. Ibid.

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Richardson

Stevenson, of course, brackets Richardson and Fielding together for purposes of comparison; and whereas Fielding is "easy, generous, and witty," Richardson is "a tea-bibber in parlors, buzzed about by second-rate women, and their fit companion, a man of painful propriety, with all the narrowness and much of the animosity of the backshop and the dissenting chapel."¹ Obviously not a gentleman in spite of "his genius and virtues," he is nevertheless unusually adept at portraying characters of gentlemen in his novels.

"Lovelace--in spite of his abominable misbehavior--Colonel Morden and my Lord M---- are all gentlemen of undisputed quality. They more than pass muster, they excel; they have a gallant, a conspicuous carriage; they roll into the book, four in hand, in gracious attitudes. The best of Fielding's gentlemen had scarce been at their ease in M--- Hall; Dr. Harrison had seemed a plain, honest man, a trifle below his company; and poor Booth (supposing him to have served in Colonel Morden's corps and to have travelled in the post-chaise along with the commandant) had been glad to slink away with Mowbray and crack a bottle in the butler's room."²

Stevenson places "a high value on the Richardsonians," particularly those found between the covers of Clarissa Harlowe. So unbounded in his admiration for this book that he can hardly

1. Stevenson, Some Gentlemen in Fiction
 2. Ibid.

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restrain his enthusiasm when he exhorts a friend to read it.

"Please, if you have not, and I don't suppose you have, already read it, institute a search in all Melbourne for one of the rarest and certainly one of the best of books--Clarissa Harlowe. For any man who takes an interest in the problems of the two sexes, that book is a perfect mine of documents. And it is written, sir, with the pen of an angel. Miss Howe and Lovelace, words cannot tell how good they are! And the scene where Clarissa beards her family, with her fan going all the while; and some of the quarrel scenes between her and Lovelace; and the scene where Colonel Morden goes to Mr. Hall, with Lord M. trying to compose matters, and the Colonel with his eternal 'Finest woman in the world,' nothing could be better! You will bless me when you read it for this recommendation; but, indeed, I can do nothing but recommend Clarissa."¹

A number of years after this letter was written, Stevenson used Clarissa Harlowe as an example to show the need of striking incident in literature. In his estimation the novel contains all the qualities which any novel can have, with the exception of one--pictorial or picture-making romance; and it is for this reason, and this reason alone, that it now lies unread in spite of its many merits.

1. Valley Letters
 1. Letter to A. Patchett Martin, 1877

Scott

The immensity of Scott's literary output and his unbelievable capacity for work astound Stevenson and fill him with envy. Talking about his writing Guy Mannering in three weeks, he exclaims in despair and admiration, "What a pull of work: heavens, what thews and sinews!"¹ More than that, however, he admires him for not having allowed his work and his study to dull his mind to all other interests.

"That is what I have always envied and admired in Scott; with all that immensity of work and study, his mind kept flexible, glancing to all points of natural interest."²

From the remark which Stevenson makes somewhere to the effect that he has no way of guessing how often he has read Rob Roy, Guy Mannering, or Redgauntlet, having begun young, it is evident that Scott ranks high in his estimation. As a matter of fact, he is one of the three novelists who have what Stevenson calls the "real creator's brush."

"Three people have had it, the real creator's brush: Scott, see much of The Antiquary and The Heart of Midlothian (especially all round the trial, before, during, and after)--Balzac--and Thackeray in Vanity Fair. Everybody else either paints thin, or has to stop to paint, or paints excitedly, so that you see the author skipping before his canvas."³

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1. Vailima Letters
 2. Letter to Mrs. Charles Fairchild, 1892
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- 1. Valima Letters
- 2. Letter to Mrs. Charles Fairchild, 1892
- 3. Valima Letters

Not only does Scott rank high in Stevenson's estimation; to him he is the best of novelists, the king of all the romantics, but, unfortunately, a king who can, and does, do wrong. Reference has already been made to Stevenson's criticism of Scott's greatness in drawing character parts, to his weakness in portraying ordinary characters, and to the inconsistencies which he puts into their speech. But beyond and above all that, Stevenson cannot forgive Scott for his laxity in style.

"For here we have a man of the finest creative instinct touching with perfect certainty and charm the romantic junctures of his story; and we find him utterly careless, almost, it would seem, incapable in the technical matter of style, and not only weak, but frequently wrong in points of drama. The man who could conceive and write the character of Elspeth of the Craighburnfoot, as Scott has conceived and written it, had not only splendid romantic, but splendid tragic gifts. How comes it, then, that he could so often fob us off with languid, inarticulate twaddle? It seems to me that the explanation is to be found in the very quality of his surprising merits. As his books are play to the reader, so were they play to him. He conjured up the romantic with delight, but he had hardly patience to describe it. He was a great day-dreamer, a seer of fit and beautiful and humorous visions, but hardly a great artist; hardly, in the manful sense, an artist at all. He pleases himself, and so he pleases us. Of the pleasures of his art he tasted fully; but of its toils and vigils and distresses never man knew less. A great romantic--an idle child."¹

1. Stevenson, A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's

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Whatever his faults, Scott has the true romantic's gift of making the right kind of thing happen in the right kind of place, of so combining and inter-weaving the feeling of a place with the action supposedly going on there that the two become indissoluble.

"Ugly actions, above all in ugly places, have the true romantic quality. ... To a man like Scott, the different appearances of nature seemed each to contain its own legend ready made. In such or such a place, only such or such events ought with propriety to happen."¹

"To-day we saw the cathedral at Chester; and far more delightful, saw and heard inimitable verger who took us round. He was full of a certain recondite, far-away humour that did not quite make you laugh at the time, but was somehow laughable to recollect. Moreover, he had so far a just imagination, and could put one in the right humour for seeing an old place, very much as, according to my favourite text, Scott's novels and poems do for one."²

On the whole, Stevenson's specific criticism of Scott's novels amounts to "I like this book," "I do not like that one," and "I like this one better than that one."

"Has Davie never read Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, or The Antiquary? All of which are worth three Waverleys. I think Kenilworth better than Waverley; Nigel, too; and Quentin Durward about as

1. Stevenson, Edinburgh
2. Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, 1874

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"Has David never read Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, or The Antiquary? All of which are worth three Waverleys. I think Kentworth better than Waverley; Mabel, too; and Quentin Durward about as

good. But it shows a true piece of insight to prefer Waverley, for it is different; and though not quite coherent, better worked in parts than almost any other; surely more carefully. It is undeniable that the love of the slap-dash and the shoddy grew upon Scott with success. Perhaps it does on many of us."1

"Time and again I tried to read Rob Roy, with whom of course I was acquainted from the Tales of a Grandfather; time and again the early part, with Rashleigh and (think of it!) the adorable Diana choked me off; and I shall never forget the pleasure and surprise with which, lying on the floor one summer evening, I struck of a sudden into the first scene with Andrew Fairservice. 'The worthy Dr. Lightfoot'--'mistrysted with a bogle'--'a wheen green trash'--'Jenny, lass, I think I ha'e her': from that day to this the phrases have been unforgotten. I read on, I need scarce say; I came to Glasgow, I bided tryst on Glasgow Bridge, I met Rob Roy and the Bailie in the Tolbooth, all with transporting pleasure; and then the clouds gather once more about my path; and I dozed and skipped until I stumbled half asleep into the clachan of Aberfoyle, and the voices of Iverach and Galbraith recalled me to myself. With that scene and the defeat of Captain Thornton the book concluded; Helen and her sons shocked even the little school-boy of nine or ten with their unreality; I read no more, or I did not grasp what I was reading; and years elapsed before I consciously met Diana and her father among the hills, or saw Rashleigh dying in the chair. When I think of that novel and that evening, I am impatient with all others; they seem but shadows and impostors; they cannot satisfy the appetite which this awakened; and I dare be known to think it the best of

1. Letter to Thomas Stevenson, 1884

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Sir Walter's by nearly as much as Sir Walter is the best of novelists. Perhaps Mr. Lang is right, and our first friends in the land of fiction are always the most real. And yet I had read before this Guy Mannering, and some of Waverley, with no such delighted sense of truth and humour, and I read immediately again the greater part of the Waverley Novels, and was never moved again in the same way or to the same degree. One circumstance is suspicious: my critical estimate of the Waverley Novels has scarce changed at all since I was ten. Rob Roy, Guy Mannering, and Redgauntlet first; then, a little lower, the Fortunes of Nigel; then, after a huge gulf, Ivanhoe, and Anne of Gierstein: the rest nowhere; such was the verdict of the boy. Since then The Antiquary, St. Ronan's Well, Kenilworth, and The Heart of Midlothian, have gone up in the scale; perhaps Ivanhoe and Anne of Gierstein have gone a trifle down; Diana Vernon has been added to my admirations in that enchanted world of Rob Roy; I think more of the letters in Redgauntlet, and Peter Peebles, that dreadful piece of realism, I can now read about with equanimity, interest, and I had almost said pleasure, while to the childish critic he often caused unmixed distress. But the rest is the same; I could not finish The Pirate when I was a child, I have never finished it yet; Peveril of the Peak dropped halfway through from my school-boy hands, and though I have since waded to an end in a kind of wager with myself, the exercise was quite without enjoyment. I still think the visit to Ponto's the best part of the Book of Snobs; does that mean that I was right when I was a child, or does it mean that I have never grown since then, that the child is not the man's father, but the man? and that I came into the world with all my faculties complete, and have only learned since to be more tolerant of boredom?"¹

1. Stevenson, Random Memories: "Rosa Quo Locorum"

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"I say, have you ever read The Highland Widow? I never had till yesterday: I am half inclined, bar a trip or two, to think it Scott's masterpiece; and it has the name of a failure! Strange things are readers."¹

George Bernard Shaw

The following quotation refers to Mr. Shaw's novel, Cashel Byron's Profession, which had been sent to Stevenson by their common friend, William Archer. There is a reference to the age of Mr. Shaw who was then thirty-two, while Stevenson, who talks like a grandfather, was his senior by only six years.

"What am I to say? I have read your friend's book with singular relish. If he has written any other, I beg you will let me see it; and if he has not, I beg him to lose no time in supplying this deficiency. It is full of promise; but I should like to know his age. There are things in it that are very clever, to which I attach small importance; it is the shape of the age. And there are passages that show genuine and remarkable narrative talent.

As a whole, it is (of course) a fever dream of the most feverish. Over Bashville the footman I howled with derision and delight; I dote on Bashville, and I am his devoted slave; Bashville est magnifique, mais il n'est guère possible. He is the note of the book. It is all mad, mad and deliriously delightful; the author has a taste in chivalry like Walter Scott's or Dumas', and then he

1. Letter to E. L. Burlingame, 1890

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daubs in little bits of socialism; he soars away on the wings of the romantic griffon--even the griffon, as he cleaves the air, shouting with laughter at the nature of the quest--and I believe in his heart he thinks he is labouring in a quarry of solid granite realism.

It is this that makes me--the most hardened adviser now extant--stand back and hold my peace. If Mr. Shaw is below five-and-twenty, let him go his path; if he is thirty, he had best be told that he is a romantic, and pursue romance with his eyes open;--or perhaps he knows it;--God knows!--

It is HORRID FUN. All I ask is more of it. Thank you for the pleasure you gave us, and tell me more of the inimitable author. (I say, Archer, my God, what women!)"1

Herbert Spencer

"No more persuasive rabbi exists, and few better. How much of his vast structure will bear the touch of time, how much is clay and how much brass, it were too curious to inquire. But his words, if dry, are always manly and honest; there dwells in his pages a spirit of highly abstract joy, plucked naked like an algebraic symbol but still joyful; and the reader will find there a caput mortuum of piety, with little indeed of its loveliness, but with most of its essentials; and these two qualities make him a wholesome, as his intellectual vigour makes him a bracing writer. I should be much of a hound if I lost my gratitude to Herbert Spencer."2

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1. Letter to William Archer, 1888
 2. Books Which Have Influenced Me

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 some, as his intellectual vigour makes him
 a bustling writer. I should be much of a
 bound if I lost my gratitude to
 Herbert Spencer."

Swift

Stevenson has absolutely no use for Swift and his outlook on life. He makes only one reference to him, and in that one reference, Stevenson, the critic, is totally devoid of that supreme quality of sympathy which should be the critic's halo. The following passage, by the way, refers to Stevenson's journey in an emigrant train from New York to San Francisco.

"I have stood on a platform while the whole train was shunting; and as the dwelling-cars drew near, there would come a whiff of pure menagerie, only a little sourer, as from men instead of monkeys. I think we are human only in virtue of open windows. Without fresh air, you only require a bad heart, and a remarkable command of the Queen's English, to become such another as Dean Swift; a king of -----, a human goat, leaping and wagging your scut on mountains of offence. I do my best to keep my head the other way, and look for the human rather than the bestial in this Yahoo-like business of the emigrant train."1

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Thackeray

The Snob Papers were an early favorite of Stevenson's.

"In four old volumes of Punch, which made for years the bulk of my diet, I very early fell in love (almost as soon as I could spell) with the Snob Papers. I knew them almost by heart, particularly the visit to the Pontos; and I remember my surprise when I found, long afterwards, that they were famous, and signed with a famous name; to me, as I read and admired them, they were the works of Mr. Punch."

A gentleman, Stevenson thinks, apparently came from Thackeray's pen without the slightest effort on his part. Incidentally, this business of gentlemen is beginning to sound like the dreadful repetition of a recurrent nightmare, but since Stevenson thought the subject important and interesting enough to write two essays on it, including Richardson, Fielding, Thackeray, and Dickens in the discussion, (not to mention Napoleon, Wellington, General Grant, and several others) the only thing to do seems to go on repeating, particularly since his few comments on these authors are based largely on their ability, or inability, to portray gentlemen.

"Thackeray could draw a gentleman as a character part, full of pettiness, tainted with vulgarity, and yet still a gentleman, in the inimitable Major Pendennis. He could draw him--the next thing to the work of God--human and true and noble and frail, in

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"Thackeray could draw a gentleman as a character, full of pertness, tainted with vulgarity, and yet still a gentleman, in the intimate sense of the word. He could draw him--the next thing to the work of God--human and true and noble and free, in

Colonel Newcome. If the art of being a gentleman were forgotten, like the art of staining glass, it might be learned anew from that one character. It is learned there, I dare to say, daily. What experience is more formative, what step of life is more efficient, than to know and weep for Colonel Newcome? Error and suffering and failure and death, those calamities that our contemporaries paint upon so vast a scale--they are all depicted here, but in a more true proportion."¹

Trying to emphasize the importance of striking incident in the novel, Stevenson states dogmatically,

"If Rawdon Crawley's blow were not delivered, Vanity Fair would cease to be a work of art. That scene is the chief ganglion of the tale; and the discharge of energy from Rawdon's fist is the reward and consolation of the reader. The end of Esmond is a yet wider excursion from the author's customary fields; the scene at Castlewood is pure Dumas; the great wily English has here borrowed from the great, unblushing French thief; as usual, he has borrowed admirably well, and the breaking of the sword rounds off the best of all his books with a manly, martial note."²

Although Stevenson considers Henry Esmond the best of Thackeray's works, it is in Vanity Fair that the novelist is said to show the "real creator's brush," an expression by which Stevenson means that he created with a full, dark brush, and achieved a strong impression.

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1. Some Gentlemen in Fiction
 2. A Gossip on Romance

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Thoreau

"Thoreau's thin, penetrating, big-nosed face, even in a bad woodcut, conveys some hint of the limitations of his mind and character. He was not easy, not ample, not urbane, not even kind; his enjoyment was hardly smiling, or the smile was not broad enough to be convincing; he had no waste lands nor kitchen-midden in his nature, but was all improved and sharpened to a point."¹

In my opinion, Stevenson's short critical essay on Thoreau is one, at least, which he should have rewritten. As it stands, you read the essay and discover that Thoreau was dry, selfish, and priggish, that, supremely indifferent to the sufferings in the world, he lived by Walden Pond merely with the object of self-improvement, that, a philosopher utterly lacking any quality of flesh and blood, he hardly made any distinction between love and friendship, "in such rarefied and freezing air, upon the mountain -tops of meditation, had he taught himself to breathe."² Then, in your great ignorance, after you have taken all these statements in good faith and have decided that Thoreau was a pretty poor specimen of humanity, you come to the paragraphs appended to the essay and discover that, in the interim, Stevenson has made the acquaintance of Dr. Japp, a friend of Thoreau's, and through him has discovered that Thoreau lived at Walden Pond so that his house in that secluded section might be a station in the great Underground Railroad, that he was once violently in

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love and gave up his claims in favor of his brother so that, presumably, his theories of love and friendship were but a balm to dull his sorrows, and so on. So that Stevenson must perforce proceed to retract some of his statements as gracefully as he can, although he insists, justifiably enough perhaps, that the statement and criticism of Thoreau's theory is pretty faithfully and accurately portrayed in the body of the essay. But the point is that the whole thing as an interpretation of Thoreau's personality is almost false, one might say, and to add, as Stevenson does, that Thoreau's theory and Thoreau's personality were two distinct things does not seem enough to fulfill the requirements of the case in justifying the perversion.

Stevenson thinks that Thoreau is much too stringent in his definition of good books which runs, "'Books, not which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institutions--such I call good books. The heroic books, even if printed in the character of our mother-tongue, will always be in a language dead to degenerate times; and we must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits out of what wisdom and valor and generosity we

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have."¹ In answer to this, Stevenson contents himself with the remark that,

"Looking round in English for a book that should answer Thoreau's two demands of a style like poetry and sense that shall be both original and inspiring, I come to Milton's Areopagitica, and can name no other instance for the moment. Two things at least are plain: that if a man will condescend to nothing more commonplace in the way of reading, he must not look to have a large library; and that if he proposes himself to write in a similar vein, he will find his work cut out for him."²

Reference has already been made to Thoreau's marked tendency, and even habit, of exaggerating consciously to make people realize what he was writing, and it hardly need be repeated that the only sort of exaggeration which Stevenson considers permissible is negative exaggeration, or exaggeration by selection.

Stevenson thinks that there are only three books of Thoreau's which can be read with much enjoyment: The Week, Walden, and the collected letters. Cape Cod and The Yankee in Canada are dull, prosaic, and utterly devoid of humor. "Of The Yankee in Canada," Stevenson says, "Thoreau confessed he had not managed to get much of himself into it. Heaven knows he had not, nor yet much of Canada, we may hope. 'Nothing,' he says somewhere, 'can shock a brave man but

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Heaven knows he had not, nor yet much of Canada, we may hope.

'Nothing,' he says somewhere, 'can shock a brave man but

dulness,' Well, there are few spots more shocking to the brave than the pages of The Yankee in Canada.¹

Obviously, Stevenson considers Thoreau's earlier books much superior to his later ones which are characterized by a great number of irrelevant details or anecdotes treated materialistically, a decided tendency toward the prosaic, and, most damaging of all, perhaps, not even a vestige of humor.

"There is a progression--I cannot call it progress--in his work toward a more and more strictly prosaic level, until at last he sinks into the bathos of the prosy. He began to fall more and more into a detailed materialistic treatment; he went into the business doggedly, as one who should make a guide-book; he not only chronicled what had been important in his own experience, but whatever might have been important in the experience of anybody else; not only what had affected him, but all that he saw or heard. His ardor had grown less, or perhaps it was inconsistent with a right materialistic treatment to display such emotions as he felt; and to complete the eventful change, he chose, from a sense of moral dignity, to gut these later works of the saving quality of humor. He was not one of those authors who have learned, in his own words, to leave out their dulness. From his later works he was in the habit of cutting out the humorous passages, under the impression that they were beneath the dignity of his moral muse; and there we see the prig stand public and confessed."²

At any rate, Thoreau's real subject and best theme, Stevenson thinks, is the pursuit of self-improvement and a

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Trollope

Stevenson's estimate of Trollope is that his books are "readable," and that he was capable of writing better ones, had he had the courage and the inclination.

"Do you know who is my favourite author just now? How are the mighty fallen! Anthony Trollope. I batten on him; he is so nearly wearying you, and yet he never does; or rather, he never does, until he gets near the end, when he begins to wean you from him as you thought you would be sorry. I wonder if it's old age? It is a little, I am sure. A young person would get sickened by the dead level of meanness and cowardliness; you require to be a little spoiled and cynical before you can enjoy it. I have just finished The Way of the World; there is only one person in it--no, there are three--who are nice; the wild American woman, and two of the dissipated young men, Dolly and Lord Nidderdale. All the heroes and heroines are just ghastly. But what a triumph is Lady Carbury! That is real, sound, strong, genuine work: the man who would do that, if he had had courage, might have written a fine book; he has

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preferred to write many readable ones."¹

"English people of the present day are apt, I know not why, to look somewhat down on incident, and reserve their admiration for the clink of teaspoons and the accents of the curate. It is thought clever to write a novel with no story at all, or at least with a very dull one. Reduced ever to the lowest terms, a certain interest can be communicated by the art of narrative; a sense of human kinship stirred; and a kind of monotonous fitness, comparable to the words and air of Sandy's Mull, preserved among the infinitesimal occurrences recorded. Some people work, in this manner, with even a strong touch. Mr. Trollope's inimitable clergymen naturally arise to the mind in this connection. But even Mr. Trollope does not confine himself to chronicling small beer. Mr. Crawley's collision with the Bishop's wife, Mr. Menette dallying in the deserted banquet-room, are typical incidents, epically conceived, fitly embodying a crisis."²

Mark Twain

"Have you read Huckleberry Finn? It contains many excellent things; above all, the whole story of a healthy boy's dealings with his conscience, incredibly well done."³

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Jules Verne

According to Stevenson, Jules Verne has the knack of writing a story.

"He is as full of resources as one of his own heroes; his books are as accurately calculated as the lines of the Nautilus or the partition-breaks of the projectile. Look, for instance, at the skill with which he keeps us interested during the eighty days of Phineas Fogg's journey round the world. He has Fix, the detective, on his trail from first to last--a continual excitement to the reader! And Fix serves yet another purpose; for the warrant which we expect at port after port keeps us always with one eye on London, and so helps us to realise the distance traveled. Another device for the same end, and even more ingenious, is the gas jet left burning by Passepartout in the hurry of the departure. All around the world we are kept in irritating remembrance of this little flicker of light in Saville Row. We are continually sent back again in fancy to the starting-point; and on each occasion we spin the globe around between our fingers, and take stock of the hero's progress. Similarly admirable is the treatment of the projectile during its perilous voyage. Everything is done to make us realise its new position as an independent world. It has a climate of its own. The dead dog, thrown out of the scuttle, accompanies it on its journey as an obedient satellite. The cold of space through which it passes, the wandering meteors it encounters, the earth seen as a crescent on the wane--all these tell their story with convincing eloquence."1

The characters in these stories, however, are no more than puppets which the author uses over and over again.

"His extraordinary stock-in-trade consists of several time-worn dolls: scientific people with bald heads, and humorous seamen of indescribable fidelity. His marionettes are all athletic and all virtuous. I do not remember one bad character in his gallery, or one who was afraid. Jules Verne has the point of honour of a good ship-captain, and holds himself personally responsible for the lives of all the crew. A few anonymous persons may perish by the way, lest we should think too lightly of the perils; but so soon as a man has been referred to by name, he bears a charmed existence and will turn up at the last page in good health and animal spirits. Once or twice, as in Captain Hatteras or The Survivors of the Chancellor, Jules Verne sins against this principle, and brings his stories to a bad end or tortures us too much upon the way; and then, I confess, he seems to me shallow and impertinent."¹

The stories are not true, obviously, but they are filled with so many convincing details and the author himself seems so sober and serious-minded that they do not seem utterly impossible of realization.

"He has fenced them in with instances and calculations, not much more trustworthy, perhaps, than the calculation in Mokeanna, but mighty reassuring to unscientific readers. Moreover, he has a sort of pedestrian quality of imagination, eminently fitted to win belief of nineteenth-century readers. He likes just to outstrip the possible, and no more: to go one step beyond his generation, one step outside the habitable world; and to do all this drily and solidly, as though he had originally prepared his facts for a learned Society, and only by an after-

1. Stevenson, Jules Verne's Stories

"His extraordinary stock-in-trade consists of several time-worn dolls: scientific people with bald heads, and humorous assemblages of indescribable fidelity. His maxims are all scientific and all virtuous. I do not remember one bad character in his gallery, or one who was afraid. . . . Jules Verne has the point of honour of a good ship-captain, and holds himself personally responsible for the lives of all the crew. A few anonymous persons may perish by the way, but we should think too lightly of the perils; but so soon as a man has been referred to by name, he gets a charmed existence and will turn up at the last page in good health and animal spirits. Once or twice, as in *Captain Hatteras* or *The Survivors of the Chancellor*, Jules Verne sins against this principle, and brings his stories to a bad end or tortures us too much upon the way; and then I confess, he seems to me shallow and imperfect."

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thought turned them to account in a fantastic tale. It is this mixture, this opposition of ends, that gives a peculiar and most original flavour to his works. This teller of extravagant stories is quite a practical man, it appears, with a taste for mechanics that puts the most of us to shame. It is little wonder if we extend some confidence, in this scientific age, to a man who goes about to get the wind of us by such purely scientific means."¹

Stevenson does not put much faith in the exactness of the author's science, but he says that even if the science is flimsy that does not affect the "super-excellence" of the tales. But whatever question there might be about his science, there is no question whatever concerning Jules Verne's knowledge of human nature. He knows nothing of it and does not profess to, a failing which Stevenson, as a jaded reader, finds very refreshing.

"It is almost with a sense of relief that one finds, in these sophisticated days, a good trotting-horse of an author who whistles by the way and affects to know nothing of the mysteries of the human heart. Once, indeed, he has gone out of his way, and with perfect ill-success; his Captain Nemo, of the undying hatred and the Scotch impromptus, is a memorable warning."²

Jules Verne, then, sounds no depths of human nature; he obviously does not labor for perfection of style; and yet his best stories are excellent. There remains only one element upon which the author can depend to hold the reader's

1. Stevenson, Jules Verne's Stories
 2. Ibid.

...for he has forgotten that the sun still shines
occasionally. However, his incisive comments
which, in Stevenson's opinion, are not only better pertinent
not effective but greatly weaken his work.

"For John I have no reservation,
though the volume, eminently portable,
and some of the things one may find
of a kind. But I would be very glad
I would receive a copy of his book
(meaning himself, not his collaborator)
in the form of the book.
John with the same vigor as the great
one: discuss anyway the black-headed
and, unfortunately, as easily with John."

"If the character of John's attitude
aim for his constant vigilance and
persistence, I think they should serve
the good; but it, as I have long
suspected, may rather serve to under-
stand the man's life, and only within in
his consciousness like a wound in steel ..."

"As far as the unresponsible
force of a John's attitude is in
technical matters. To allow a possible
flavor and stretch the web, he adds a
ready current of what I may be allowed
to call the 'hand'."

"The Hand was a big book.
I have no need for a bigger, though the
last part is a mere mistake in my opinion.
But the language, and style, and the
color of the sentences, and the horizon
in the field of battle, how, how wrapped
it is in an actual environment!
According to my own opinion, I believe
I could go over your book and find a
masterpiece of fiction and no fiction
at all. But what is an old story, ever new

1. Letter to William, London, 1902
2. Letter to John, 1903
3. Stevenson, A Book on Fiction

attention: the interest of the plot, and that, in his case, is often sufficient. In one instance, at least, it was sufficient to send one reader, himself an experienced storyteller, in quest of the first volume of a story after he had stumbled upon the second volume by chance.

"Such a book as The Fur Country will stand almost any test you like to put it to. For my own part, I first had the whole plot retailed to me by an enthusiastic admirer; some time after I fell upon the second volume and read it with such pleasure that I lost no time in procuring and reading the first. It would be difficult to pay a higher compliment to a book without any pretension to style, human nature or philosophy, which offers no interest but the legitimate interest of the fable, and hinges for a great while on an elaborate mystery."¹

Zola

Zola is a brilliant man with great powers, a fact which Stevenson admits ungrudgingly although he thinks the powers are badly misused, but he has no patience with him. The two are diametrically opposed in their outlook on life and consequently in their narrative practice. To Stevenson, Zola is the supreme example of the realist who practically goes miles out of his way to portray, faithfully or not, the dirt and the filth of life, who is so busy searching for

1. Jules Verne's Stories

attention: the interest of the plot, and that, in his case, is often sufficient. In one instance, at least, it was sufficient to send one reader, himself an experienced story-teller, in quest of the first volume of a story after he had stumbled upon the second volume by chance.

"Such a book as The Far Country will stand almost any test you like to put it to. For my own part, I first had the whole plot revealed to me by an enthusiastic admirer; some time after I fell upon the second volume and read it with such pleasure that I lost no time in procuring and reading the first. It would be difficult to pay a higher compliment to a book without any pretension to style, human nature or philosophy, which offers no interest but the legitimate interest of the fable, and hinges for a great while on an elaborate mystery."

Zola

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squalor that he has forgotten that the sun still shines occasionally. Moreover, Zola includes countless details which, in Stevenson's opinion, are not only neither pertinent nor effective but greatly weaken his work.

"For Zola I have no toleration, though the curious, eminently bourgeois, and eminently French creature has power of a kind. But I would he were deleted. I would not give a chapter of old Dumas (meaning himself, not his collaborators) for the whole boiling of the Zolas. Romance with the smallpox--as the great one: diseased anyway and black-hearted and fundamentally at enmity with joy."¹

"If the admirers of Zola admire him for his pertinent ugliness and pessimism, I think they should admire The Ebb-Tide; but if, as I have long suspected, they neither admire nor understand the man's art, and only wallow in his rancidness like a hound in offal ..."²

"A man of the unquestionable force of M. Zola spends himself on technical successes. To afford a popular flavour and attract the mob, he adds a steady current of what I may be allowed to call the rancid."³

"The Débâcle was a big book. I have no need for a bigger, though the last part is a mere mistake in my opinion. But the Emperor, and Sedan, and the doctor at the ambulance, and the horses in the field of battle, Lord, how gripped it is! What an epical performance! According to my usual opinion, I believe I could go over that book and leave a masterpiece by blotting and no ulterior art. But that is an old story, ever new

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 2. Letter to Henry James, 1893
 3. Stevenson, A Note on Realism

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"The Dépêche was a big book. I have no need for a digger, though the last part is a mere mistake in my opinion. But the Emperor, and Sedan, and the horses, the ambulance, and the horses in the field of battle, Lord, how tripped it! What an epical performance! According to my usual opinion, I believe I could go over that book and leave a masterpiece by blotting and no inferior art. But that is an old story, ever new

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VI. Conclusion

A. Resumé of Stevenson

Stevenson

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discussion from art to literature and back again, as expediency

dictates, and as Stevenson did himself.

with me. Taine gone, and Renan, and Symonds, and Tennyson, and Browning; the suns go swiftly out, and I see no suns to follow, nothing but a universal twilight of the demi-divinities, with parties like you and me and Lang beating on toy drums and playing on penny whistles about glow-worms. But Zola is big anyway; he has plenty in his belly; too much, that is all; he wrote the Débâcle and he wrote La Bête Humaine, perhaps the most excruciatingly silly book that I ever read to an end. And why did I read it to an end, W. E. G.? Because the animal in me was interested in the lewdness. Not sincerely, of course, my mind refusing to partake in it; but the flesh was slightly pleased. And when it was done, I cast it from me with a peal of laughter, and forgot it, as I would forget a Montepin. Taine is to me perhaps the chief of these losses; I did luxuriate in his Origines; it was something beyond literature, not quite so good, if you please, but so much more systematic, and the pages that had to be 'written' always so adequate."1

"The Bête Humaine I had already perused in Noumea, listening the while to the strains of the convict band. He is a Beast; but not human, and, to be frank, not very interesting."2

1. Letter to Edmund Gosse, 1893
2. Letter to Henry James, 1890

A. Resume of Stevenson's Critical Opinions

Stevenson was interested in all the problems of art,

but his primary and lasting concern was literature. He was interested in the past of all creative work, but his interest was somewhat in the nature of a boomers in that its inevitable point of departure and point of return was literature. Thus, a

close examination of his works has unearthed his general theories of art, in so far as he ever expressed them, but these theories were dealt with in a haphazard, hazy way of explanation by him since these excursions into the broad field of art were always prompted by a desire to make whatever phase of literature,

which he happened to be discussing at the moment, clearer, or else were intended to serve as analogies or examples to prove his point. In other words, Stevenson made various statements pertaining to art which I have collected and grouped into an interpretation of his general theories of art, but these are incomplete and rather thin for the simple reason that when he talked about art, his lips pronounced the words decidedly enough,

but his eyes were usually fixed on literature, and he was impatient to hurry back to it. For this reason, and for the sake of brevity, in this concluding chapter, I shall shift the discussion from art to literature and back again, as expediency dictates, and as Stevenson did himself.

Stevenson looks on art, and therefore on literature, as a pleasure which the artist turns into a trade. It is a trade, as one could guess, because the artist earns his living by it, but beyond that it is a craft, analogous to any other craft, in that its rudiments must be learned before it can be practised with any degree of success. Every young artist, he thinks, must spend a period of time in "snoozing," or, in other words, in learning the rudiments of his art as if these were an end in themselves. Some critics of Stevenson claim that he debases the noble tradition of art when he says, as he often does, that the artist lives by a pleasure; to my mind, he elevates the tradition since his use of the word "pleasure" in this case assumes that the artist is so engrossed in his art that unceasing toil in the quest of technical perfection and forgetfulness of self in absolute devotion to the advancement of art are synonymous to pleasure in his vocabulary. As a matter of fact, Stevenson, far from "debasing," paints a picture of the artist-as-he-should-be which is somewhat too idealized. This picture represents the artist as an individual scornful of praise and fame, honest, frugal, careless of concerns as petty as money, conscientious, endowed with great strength of character, wracked by an aspiration for perfection that spurs him on to greater and greater endeavor. It is true that he says that there are other ways of life which are perhaps more manly than the practice of an art, but by this the descendant of vigorous, hardy generations of lighthouse builders

descendant of vigorous, hardy generations of light-house builders perhaps more manly than the practice of an art, but by this the that he says that there are other ways of life which are scornful of praise and fame, honest, frugal, careless of concerns as petty as money, conscientious, endowed with great strength of character, wracked by an aspiration for perfection that spurs him on to greater and greater endeavor. It is true idealized. This picture represents the artist as an individual picture of the artist-as-he-should-be which is somewhat too matter of fact, Stevenson, far from "debatable," paints a of art are synonymous to pleasure in his vocabulary. As a forgetfulness of self in absolute devotion to the advancement that unceasing toil in the quest of technical perfection and this case assumes that the artist is so engrossed in his art elevates the tradition since his use of the word "pleasure" in does, that the artist lives by a pleasure; to my mind, he debases the noble tradition of art when he says, as he often end in themselves. Some critics of Stevenson claim that he words, in learning the rudiments of his art as if these were an thinks, must spend a period of time in "amusing," or, in other practised with any degree of success. Every young artist, he craft, in that its rudiments must be learned before it can be by it, but beyond that it is a craft, analogous to any other trade, as one could guess, because the artist earns his living as a pleasure which the artist turns into a trade. It is a Stevenson looks on art, and therefore on literature,

merely means that it is perhaps more virile to earn one's bread by a trade which involves some danger, and from the practice of which the worker does not derive so much joy and satisfaction. But that is not equivalent to saying that art is play for the artist, and if there is anything that is at all debasing in what has just been said, my sense of values and my vocabulary are all awry.

By dint of persistence and by the continual imitation of good models, any man, not paralysed by ignorance of the rules of grammar or by an absolute inability to express himself, can learn to write in time; but, in spite of that, artists are born, not made. They are born with an intense, almost suffocating, desire to experiment and to create with words, pigments, or whatever the medium may be. And the real artist has one medium which he prefers above all others, though his interest in his particular field usually leads him to a general interest in all the arts. Incidentally, this belief of Stevenson's that the artist's career is predestined by the mark of a vocation is given credence when one reads of his own elaborate system of truancy to escape from his college classes, and this idler's sudden reform and his persistent toil in teaching himself to write. At any rate, the real artist, whether he be first-rate or third-rate, has a definite vocation, and it never occurs to him to question whether what he is doing is worth the effort. A boys' book of adventure is not high art, according to Stevenson, since it lacks significance,

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but if he attempts such a book he spares himself no pains to write it as well as if he were occupied with some work of dramatic or tragical import.

The end of any art is to make a pattern of some sort, and it is this end, common to them all, which is the bond uniting all the arts. In that literature deals with words, its pattern consists in the creation of sounds in time, a pattern which has a greater appeal for mankind than the other arts because it is made up of the dialect of life, but a pattern, nevertheless, which is difficult to manipulate since words are rigid, finite, and have become connotative, oftentimes basely, through continuous usage. All artists, therefore, are primarily occupied with the building of some sort of pattern, but the ultimate ends for which this pattern is designed are significance and charm.

Stevenson admits that morality is a factor in art, but he is decidedly opposed to the theory that art should have a conscious moral aim, and that morality which he acknowledges is broad and magnanimous. All great novels, for instance, are based on a philosophical or moral idea, but the moral purpose and the artistic effect are developed in conjunction one with the other and are so closely knit as to be one. The "novel with a purpose," inadvertently defeats its own intention by its blundering insistence upon forcing its lesson on the reader from every page. The greatest teachers, in Stevenson's estimation, are those who teach unconsciously by communicating

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the best that is in themselves. The artist, then, should not be deluded by the idea that he has to teach something, but he should realize that there is a definite relation between his personal virtues and the quality of his work. The more honest he is, the better his work will be.

No art, according to Stevenson, creates an illusion. When we are in the theater, we never really forget that the actors are merely playing a role and that they will resume their own identity as soon as the last curtain has fallen; we read books to lose our contact with the humdrum cares of reality, but we forget ourselves so rarely that it is a tribute to the author's skill when we condescend to assume the hero's role and to take part in the adventures in our own person, and even then this is done consciously and by our own volition. And as no art creates an illusion, no art attempts to compete with life. In that very fact lies its power. The novelist does not, or should not, present a picture of life without rearrangement. From the vast materials which chaotic, illogical, infinite life presents, the novelist, having chosen one dominating thought to be the lodestar in his selection, selects only those elements which have a definite relation to his immediate design, and it is only by this system of judicious selection that he succeeds in giving a picture, or a simplification, of some particular phase of life which is reasoned, logical, and, above all, significant. To this extent, then, the novel, and all art, is a substitute for life, but a substitute which has

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more meaning than the original, or at least a meaning which is apprehended more easily and more readily. Thus, so far as it imitates, literature does not imitate life but speech with all its suppressions and emphasis.

From his early youth, Stevenson had the idea that literature, and, by the same token, art, should never depress the reader, and as he grew older this idea became more firmly entrenched in his mind. The Master of Ballantrae, he says, is imperfect in essence because it lacks all pleasurable-ness. Brutal assaults upon the feelings like the unrelieved pathos of the song, Home Sweet Home, are deplorable. Man's lot in life is dreary enough without having it made worse by bad art. And it is definitely bad art to make a story or a novel end unhappily when there is no apparent reason in the plot for closing the work on a note of unhappiness. Obviously, Stevenson does not mean by this that the author should assume a "Pollyanna" attitude at the start and that he should freeze intellectually into that posture until the end of his career. He does not mean that the author should not deal with tragical or sad material, or that he should shun all trafficking with pathos and unpleasantness. He merely means that the author should not make a point of depressing his reader's morale, and, on the other hand, that he should make it a point to give him added zest for the game of life. Tragedies never seem to "come off" as far as Stevenson is concerned. His view of life, and of letters, is essentially the romantically comic.

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Stevenson's critics cannot seem to agree on whether he helped or hindered the cause of romance, although the majority lean to the opinion that he rescued romance from the toils of realism. Swinnerton, for one, apparently holding Stevenson responsible for all the mediocre and bad romances that appeared after he had laid his pen aside, ends his book, entitled Robert Louis Stevenson, with the statement that if romance is dead, it is because Stevenson killed it. Since a teacher cannot be judged fairly by the poor efforts of his disciples, however, Stevenson cannot be held accountable for the bad work of his followers, and so Swinnerton's accusation does not need to be refuted. Anybody who knew anything at all about Stevenson would know that he never wearied of singing gay arias extolling the charms of romance, and dirges depicting the drabness of realism. Romance never had a stauncher champion than Stevenson, no man ever labored more tirelessly under its banner, and no man ever achieved greater success in its name. So that William Lyon Phelps rightly comments on the role which Stevenson played in the revival of romance during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when he says,

"When the giant Realism had got the spirit of English fiction safely locked into the dungeon, the young knightly figure of Stevenson arrived and released her. One man, appearing at just the moment when readers were either weary or disgusted with the reigning Sovereign, Realism, toppled him over with the sheer audacity of genius. For Stevenson's immense service to letters was really nothing more nor less than

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opening the windows of heaven, and sweeping the chambers of art with air and sunshine."¹

Romance, according to Stevenson's interpretation of the term, as far as I can gather from his writings, does not necessarily imply a return to the past, a setting for action in far-away lands whose very names have a romantic association, exoticism of any sort, or any of the other common ideas that are ordinarily associated with the word. Romance, to him, means stirring incident, or adventure, in the right kind of setting for the particular action narrated. As he describes it, romance is nothing more nor less than "picture-making scenes," or incident that is so much a part of its setting, that is so closely interwoven with it, that the pictorial quality of the scene grasps the imagination of the reader by its fitness. In the highest order of literature, or narrative, he says, the pictorial and the dramatic, the romantic and the moral, interest inhere one in the other and form an organic whole, but he thinks that it is possible to subordinate the dramatic or moral element completely to the elevation of romance or pictorially striking adventure. Not only does he think that it is possible to do so; he thinks that it is possible to make good stories out of material which is entirely a-moral, stories in which the characters are no more than puppets. Again, the true romantic artist "makes a romance of all things." He delves into the most pedestrian realism, and he reaches up at the same time into the

1. Phelps, The Advance of the English Novel, p. 135

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highest abstraction of idealism.

Nobody making a study of Stevenson's literary theories could possibly afford to omit all mention of romance, and in the same category are bracketed realism and idealism. This question of realism and idealism has been discussed in great detail in the body of the thesis, but it seems imperative to repeat once more that Stevenson insists time and again that the question of realism and idealism is merely one of a difference of method in the presentment of material. The realist stresses detail, the idealist tends to suppress it, but, since both are working for the same ends--significance and charm, the idealist has as great a chance of being "true" as the realist has. The realist's immediate danger is that he will lose all sense of values and that he will come to consider any fact worthy of inclusion provided that it affords him the opportunity of displaying his technical skill; the idealist's danger is that he will become too abstract and vague and that he will lose all grasp of reality.

In my opinion, Stevenson is too much of a slave to romance to view realism dispassionately and to consider it disinterestedly. In the first place, the creed of realism is entirely against his principles on two counts: a tendency to dwell on the depressing and rancid sides of life, and a tendency to include multitudinous details. More important still, it seems to me that he does not grasp the ends towards which realism is striving. All art, he thinks, as I have already

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In my opinion, Stevenson is too much of a slave to romance to view realism dispassionately and to consider it distasteful. In the first place, the creed of realism is entirely against the principles on two counts: a tendency to dwell on the depressing and repellent sides of life, and a tendency to include multitudinous details. More important still, it seems to me that he does not grasp the ends towards which realism is striving. All art, he thinks, as I have already

pointed out, strives for significance and charm; and there, I think, we have the crux of the matter. It is easily and readily granted that every artist tries to achieve significance and to touch the truth according to his own lights, whatever other qualities he may desire, and whatever his method of presentment may be; but it seems difficult to agree with the statement that the realist is striving for charm. He may strive to give an impression of actuality, verisimilitude, or what you will, but certainly he does not strive for charm. The realist and the idealist are both working for the same objective in that they are both trying to embody, through the means of a series of imagined events, some fundamental truth of life or of human nature; but, while the realist attempts to present a picture of life as it is in actuality, or as it appears to him to be in actuality, with no particular interest in whether the picture is charming or not, the idealist, also with the expressed purpose of showing life in reality since he also seeks to embody fundamental truths, consciously tones down the harsh hues of reality, and tries to represent life as it might be, or as he dreams that it might be. So that Stevenson is justified in stating that there is no such thing as an inherently realistic or an inherently idealistic subject, and he is justified in making a distinction between realism and idealism on the method employed to present the subject-matter rather than on the basis of the subject-matter itself. He is thus right in saying that realism is a question of method, but it seems to me

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 pointed out, strives for significance and charm; and there, I

that he does not seem to realize that it is a method induced by a particular habit of thinking, by a particular slant on life, and that this mode of thinking, with which a man was born, cannot be discarded or resumed, chameleon-like, by the artist every time he attempts a fresh work. And though the realist, in his passion for completeness, may often be led to abjure all choice in selection and to include an inordinate number of details, it seems to me that it would be more pertinent to distinguish the realist's method from the idealist's, in the treatment of detail, rather more specifically by the quality of the details which he uses than by their quantity. As it is, Stevenson contents himself by saying that the realist tries to use details which are striking to the eye, while the idealist, tending to suppress details, is satisfied to use those which are more or less conventional.

Again, Stevenson is temperamentally unfitted to understand the realist's aim in stressing the humdrum routine of ordinary life, and the unpleasant, dreary, and objectionable phases of life. This statement, to be clear, only needs to be qualified by two utterances which Stevenson made, and which have already been quoted: the first, that he feels a "voluntary aversion from the painful sides of life," and the second, that "dirt need not be ignoble."

Stevenson says that the only way to learn to write is by practice and by the continual imitation of good models. He himself learned that way, and his candid account of his having

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Stevenson says that the only way to learn to write is by practice and by the continual imitation of good models. He himself learned that way, and his candid account of his having

played the "sedulous ape" to a host of authors during his period of apprenticeship has given rise to much dissent among his critics, and has been misinterpreted by some of them into an admission of continual imitation on Stevenson's part, and an exhortation to young writers to indulge in imitation to their heart's content. The critic, Chapman, for one, in his Emerson and Other Essays, gives an amusing and almost convincing account, so dogmatic and positive does he sound, of Stevenson the imitator, the unbelievably versatile monkey, carrying on his career of wholesale stylistic plagiarism. To say that Stevenson's career was one of imitation is to wander very far from the truth, but this perversion need not detail us, since our concern in this thesis centers on Stevenson's literary theories rather than on his literary practice. To say that Stevenson advises the young writer to carry the practice of imitation beyond the stages of apprenticeship, however, is a definite stop signal. While talking about the artist in general, Stevenson makes the statement that the period of apprenticeship, which, in the writer's case, entails practice in the imitation of good models, should not be extended indefinitely, that when the artist has once mastered the technical elements of his chosen art, he should proceed without undue delay to the next stage, that of actual creation or representation. And this step of graduation from practice and experiment to execution is the moment when Stevenson assumes that the writer will automatically place all thoughts of imitation

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behind him, and the moment when he himself bade farewell to those genial hosts who had entertained him well even while they taught him how to write.

Stevenson believes that work is salutary, but he thinks that the writer derives the greatest benefit when he takes his work in batches, with intervals of rest and relaxation between the periods of endeavor, and when he varies his work in subject and in degree of difficulty. He recognizes two types of imagination: the fustian and the sincere. To be fit for art, a thing must not only be sincerely imagined, but the truth of the imaginative concept must be apparent. "Unprincipled avidity after effect," or exaggerated imaginings which beggar belief, are frowned upon by him. Again, he thinks that the author can often use the matter of his recollections to great advantage, but the best method in thus using one's recollections is to allow a considerable length of time to elapse between an occurrence, a journey, perhaps, or whatever the matter of the recollections may be, and the attempt to use them for the purposes of literature. He considers collaboration an advantage in that two minds are focussed on the same material, but on the whole, the limitations of this method of writing far outweigh the possible advantages. The only condition under which he considers collaboration at all possible is when one of the collaborators directs the work and is responsible for it.

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to go into it in detail. As a result, I shall give the highlights of the main points which I have deduced from a study of his works.

He thinks that narrative is the most characteristic, or the most typical, mood of literature, and he says that the principles of the art of narrative, which consists in "the clear conception of certain characters of man, the choice and presentation of certain incidents out of a great number that offered, and the invention (yes, invention) and preservation of a certain key in dialogue," are the same whether the narrator deals with a series of imagined events or with actual happenings. Again, few people possess a genuine narrative talent, and fewer yet have the wit to appreciate it when it is present.

He thinks that the novel is not a transcript of actual life, but a significant simplification of some phase of life. The novelist in constructing his plot should strive for unity. He should decide the type of novel which he wants to write, or what element of narrative he wishes to emphasize, and he should choose a dominating thought to direct the work. Every incident and every word in the book should have a definite bearing on this definite design. It follows that sub-plots should not be used unless they are a completion or a reversion of the main intrigue.

Characters in a book should think and talk naturally, and the novelist should strive to render his puppets spirited, vital, consistent, and, above all, possible. Stevenson thinks

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that the most common way of building characters is to use one's friends and acquaintances for the groundwork or foundation of the fictitious characters. Again, the author should not be hazy concerning the setting of his action; it necessary to verify his facts, he should have recourse to the almanac and to maps. Stevenson has nothing to say concerning the different points of view in presenting a narrative, although it may be said in passing that his favorite practice was to write first person tales. Since he sees literature in terms of movement, and since description is necessarily static, he has no sympathy for "word painters," but he approves of description, and even profuse description, provided that it is effective. All that has been said concerning the novel applies directly to the short story, of course, and with even greater pertinency. Since the short story's aim is to create a single impression, the short story writer must have an even greater regard for unity in constructing his plot than the novelist, and so on.

Stevenson thinks that the true function of biography is to give an unbiased, disinterested picture of the person in question, although he insists that there must be a bond of sympathy between the biographer and his subject. The historian, he says, is forced by the nature of his task to give a picture of the difference in epochs rather than in personalities. He thinks that the English nation is laboring under the misconception that the serious drama has to do with incident rather than with passion. That with which it deals exclusively is passion,

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which must increase progressively as the play develops, and the vacillations of the conscience torn between duty and desire. The dramatic author is limited in time and space, and beyond that he is hampered by the fact that he must deal, in great measure, with real things rather than with the artistic conventions for things. Thus, the novel is not so realistic in a sense as the drama, but it can include many elements which are forever out of the range of the drama. The old form of the fable has been superseded by a new form which is similar to the old fable in that it is brief, that a moral idea of some sort lies behind the action, and that the object is to make the reader aware of this moral idea through the intellect rather than through the emotions. The chief difference between the two forms is that the modern fabulist seeks to establish a logical connection between the moral and the machinery used to express it, and that he seeks analogies where his predecessor looked for humorous situations. The ballad is intensely abstract and subjective and could not, under any conditions, be classified among the realistic arts.

According to Stevenson, the best style is not the most natural, for the most natural is the disconnected, fragmentary, terse accounts of the old chronicler. Style is synthetic, and the best style, therefore, is that which contains the greatest implication of wit and philosophy. He is convinced that style is not due to accident, but that it is the result of practice and an intimate and thorough knowledge of the technical

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principles which constitute style. He has written an essay entitled On Some Technical Principles of Style in Literature which should be of practical assistance to the beginner. In this essay, he carries his analysis down to a study of the pattern of letters. The first preoccupation of the writer is the choice of words, and the words used should be exact, vigorous, colorful, suggestive, and harmonious. Every sentence should be so constructed that it contains a knot or a hitch so that up to a certain point the thought is increasingly complicated, and then it is resolved. And this complication and explication in the thought should be accompanied by a corresponding movement in the rhythm. In other words, the texture, or the web, and the text must be developed together, and the logic of the thought and the quality of the pattern should not be made to suffer at each other's expense. Moreover, prose should be rhythmical, but it should never be metrical, and to write blank verse unconsciously is not to write good prose. Assonance and alliteration are not to be frowned upon, but rather are they to be favored, for harmonious and potent effects may be attained by running a recurrence of certain letters, provided that they are withheld now and then to avoid monotony and too much repetition of the same sounds.

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has, and he tries to produce in others, a passion for compression and an economy of words that makes for clearness and clean-cut vividness. He disapproves of "fine writing," and purple patches, but he insists that if the writer leads up to fine writing he should not avoid it.

Much has been written concerning Stevenson's style and the emphasis which he places on good writing. All his critics agree that his is one of the best styles of the nineteenth century, although some of them complain that it is too perfect since it is in vain that one looks in his works for a harsh word. An evaluation of Stevenson's style is not in order here, but it seems rather peculiar to say that a perfect thing can be too perfect. At any rate, even though Stevenson surprises one by saying that Pepys is worth reading even though he does not always write well and sometimes writes badly, it seems to me that as a theory Stevenson places too much emphasis upon style, by and for itself, and that he is too apt to disregard that heat and intensity of creation when the imagination is so active that the words, so it seems, must fall into line almost by themselves. I do not see how a writer, under the stress of creation, can take the time to think of his style in terms of the detailed analysis ranging from the pattern of according letters to the structure of the sentence which Stevenson has given us, without losing some of that intensity and white-heat of creation. At any rate, Stevenson thought style an important factor in any kind of writing, and his emphasis on the

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importance of style seems to have been justified when one stops to reflect that Treasure Island, which is no more than a boys' book of adventure, bids fair to become one of the classics of literature merely because its author thought that anything worth writing was worth writing well.

It is an admirable trait, and that the critic, obviously, should be sympathetic to the extent of realizing what the author, or artist, has attempted to do or to represent in any particular work, to the extent of agreeing that the artistic purpose, whatever it may be, is worth achieving, and to the extent of judging the actual performance along these lines of measurement. But to say that this spirit of sympathy should lead the critic to dwell on merits rather than on faults seems, to me, to be leaving the right road. Such criticism will doubtless please the author in question, if he is alive, but it will hardly help him to realize his failings in technique or in style and to correct them in so far as it is in his power to do so, and it will not give other authors the opportunity of profiting by his mistakes. I do not say that critics, inversely to Stevenson's theory, should make it a point to indicate imperfections and to overlook merits, but I do say that Stevenson's theory of criticism could be labeled aggregations more justly and more exactly than criticism.

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B. Stevenson's Critical Theory and Practice

According to Stevenson's theory of criticism, the critic's main tool should be sympathy, and this spirit of sympathy should lead him to concentrate on merits rather than on faults. It cannot be denied that sympathy is an admirable trait, and that the critic, obviously, should be sympathetic to the extent of realizing what the author, or artist, has attempted to do or to represent in any particular work, to the extent of agreeing that the artistic purpose, whatever it may be, is worth achieving, and to the extent of judging the actual performance along these lines of measurement. But to say that this spirit of sympathy should lead the critic to dwell on merits rather than on faults seems, to me, to be leaving the right road. Such criticism will doubtlessly please the author in question, if he is alive, but it will hardly help him to realize his failings in technique or in style and to correct them in so far as it is in his power to do so, and it will not give other authors the opportunity of profiting by his mistakes. I do not say that criticism, inversely to Stevenson's theory, should make it a point to indicate imperfections and to overlook merits, but I do say that Stevenson's theory of criticism could be labeled Appreciations more justly and more exactly than Criticism.

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How Stevenson actually follows his own theory in practice is another matter. One cannot deny that he is always

sympathetic, except where the realists are concerned, and in the case of the poet, François Villon, and here his attitude is due rather to an error in judgment than to an absolute lack of sympathy, but he certainly does not dwell on the perfections of the work or of the personality under discussion to the total exclusion of faults. He gives generous credit to all qualities, but he is not at all averse to giving "credit" as generously to all faults and imperfections. He does not hesitate to tell us, it will be remembered, that Thoreau is a prig and that a great deal of his work is very dry and utterly humorless, that Hugo tried our credibility to the breaking point with his exaggerations, that Poe, after having written some of his infamous stories, King Pest in particular, is better dead, and so on. So that Stevenson's theory, like most theories, is one thing, and Stevenson's practice another.

On the whole, it seems to me, Stevenson is not ruthless enough to make a very convincing critic. For one thing, he is too inordinately scrupulous about being absolutely fair to the person whom he is discussing, and for another, he is not opinionated enough. It is readily granted that the critic should be fair, and that being opinionated is never a virtue, but Stevenson makes such a task of honesty, and he is so willing to concede the fact that his interpretation is not the only one possible, nor perhaps the most correct one, that less worry on his part on whether he is praising the author too much or too little, more self-assurance, perhaps, in assuming that his

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interpretation is the correct one, and more decision in stating it, would be an advantage. "Your Webster is not my Webster; nor your Herrick my Herrick," he writes on one occasion. "On these matters we must fire a gun to leeward, show our colours, and go by. Argument is impossible. They are two of my favourite authors: Herrick above all: I suppose they are two of yours. Well, Janus-like, they do behold us two with diverse countenances, few features are common to these different avatars; and we can but agree to differ, but still with gratitude to our entertainers, like two guests at the same dinner, one of whom takes clear and one white soup. By my way of thinking, neither of us need be wrong."¹ This is a laudable, sensible point of view, to my mind, but such tolerance for another's opinions, it would seem, is not typical of the critic's way of reasoning. The critic, one would assume, loves nothing better than a spirited argument, and had Stevenson had the real critic's temperament, he would have stopped then and there, for the mere principle of the thing and because he could not resist the temptation, and he would have attempted to convince his friend that Herrick and Webster could be interpreted intelligently in only one way, and that, obviously, Stevenson's.

In justice, it should perhaps be mentioned that Stevenson's few attempts at formal criticism--exclusive of the casual criticism scattered throughout his letters--were written

1. Letter to W. E. Gosse, 1883

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when he was relatively young, and that this fact may explain to some degree his obvious reluctance to stand squarely behind his criticisms as they were written; but the point is that when a man sets himself up as a judge, even though he be but a young man and inexperienced, he should at least simulate some degree of more or less dogmatic self-assurance, even if he has not a shred of it. What I am referring to is the fact that the critical essays contained in Familiar Studies of Men and Books are accompanied by a preface or an epilogue of some sort all running to the same theme that Stevenson has perhaps praised the author too much, or belittled him unwarrantedly. I may be making a mountain out of a molehill that irritated me at the time of reading, but, even so, because of these vacillating half-apologies on Stevenson's part, one is apt to get the feeling that it would perhaps be simpler, and more satisfactory in the long run, to read the original works on which Stevenson is basing his criticism, and to draw one's own conclusions. At any rate, the following paragraphs are the ones that called forth these remarks, and I leave to the reader the privilege of drawing his own conclusions.

"For my part, I have a small idea of the degree of accuracy possible to man, and I feel sure these studies teem with error. One and all were written with genuine interest in the subject; many, however, have been conceived and finished with imperfect knowledge; and all have lain, from beginning to end, under the disadvantages inherent in this style of writing."

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1. Preface of Familiar Studies of Men and Books

"For my part, I have a small idea of the degree of accuracy possible to man, and I feel sure these studies form with error. One and all were written with genuine interest in the subject; many, however, have been conceived and finished with imperfect knowledge; and all have lain from beginning to end, under the disadvantages inherent in this style of writing."

drawing his own conclusions. Forth these remarks, and I leave to the reader the privilege of any rate, the following paragraphs are the ones that called bearing his criticism, and to draw one's own conclusions. At the long run, to read the original works on which Stevenson is

ing that it would perhaps be simpler, and more satisfactory in half-apologies on Stevenson's part, one is apt to get the feeling of reading, but, even so, because of these vacillating

making a mountain out of a molehill that irritated me at the the author too much, or belittled him unwarrantably. I may be running to the same theme that Stevenson has perhaps praised are accompanied by a preface or an epilogue of some sort all

critical essays contained in Familiar Studies of Men and Books

shared of it. What I am referring to is the fact that the

of more or less dogmatic self-assurance, even if he has not a

man and inexperienced, he should at least simulate some degree

man sets himself up as a judge, even though he be but a young

criticisms as they were written; but the point is that when a

some degree his obvious reluctance to stand squarely behind his

when he was relatively young, and that this fact may explain to

"Perhaps I have done scant justice to the charm of the old Duke's verses, and certainly he is too much treated as a fool!"¹

"This essay on Victor Hugo is an instance of the 'point of view.' The five romances studied with a different purpose might have given different results, even with a critic so warmly interested in their favor. The great contemporary master of wordmanship, and indeed of all literary arts and technicalities, had not unnaturally dazzled a beginner."²

"I had written another paper full of gratitude for the help that had been given me in my life, full of enthusiasm for the intrinsic merit of the poems, and conceived in the noisiest extreme of youthful eloquence. The present study was a rifacimento. From it, with the design already mentioned, and in a fit of horror at my old excess, the big words and emphatic passages were ruthlessly excised. But this sort of prudence is frequently its own punishment; along with the exaggeration, some of the truth is sacrificed; and the result is cold, constrained, and grudging. In short, I might almost everywhere have spoken more strongly than I did."³

"Of the Pepys essay I can say nothing; for it has been too recently through my hands; and I still retain some of the heat of composition. Yet it may serve as a text for the last remark I have to offer. To Pepys I think I have been amply just; to the others, to Burns, to Thoreau, Whitman, Charles of Orleans, even Villon, I have found myself in the retrospect ever too grudging of praise, ever too disrespectful in manner. It is not easy to see why I should have been most liberal to the man of least pretensions. Perhaps some cowardice withheld me from the proper warmth of tone; perhaps it is easier to be just to

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 2. Victor Hugo's Romances
 3. Walt Whitman

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"Of the Pepys essay I can say nothing; for it has been too recently through my hands; and I still retain some of the heat of composition. Yet it may serve as a text for the last remark I have to offer. To Pepys I think I have been empty just; to the others, to Burns, to Thomson, Whittier, Charles of Orleans, even Villon, I have found myself in the retrospect ever too grudging of praise; ever too disrespectful in manner. It is not easy to see why I should have been most liberal to the man of least pretensions. Perhaps some cowardice withheld me from the proper warmth of tone; perhaps it is easier to be just to

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those nearer to us in rank of mind. Such at least is the fact which other critics may explain. For these were all men whom for one reason or another, I loved; or when I did not love the men, my love was the greater to their books. I had read them and lived with them; for months they were continually in my thoughts; I seemed to rejoice in their joys and to sorrow with them in their griefs; and behold, when I came to write of them, my tone was sometimes hardly courteous and seldom wholly just."¹

"Stevenson's essays," Saintsbury says, with some justice, "were marred by the fact that much of them was occupied by criticism, for which, though his taste was original and delicate, his knowledge was not quite solid enough, and his range of sympathies a little deficient in width."² Leslie Stephen expresses much the same idea when he says,

"Stevenson's critical essays, again, may not imply a very wide knowledge of literature or familiarity with orthodox standards of judgment. They more than atone for any such defects by the freshness and the genuine ring of youthful enthusiasm. I am hopelessly unable, for example, to appreciate Walt Whitman. Stevenson himself only regretted that he had qualified his enthusiasm by noticing too pointedly some of his author's shortcomings. The shortcomings stick in my throat; but if I cannot catch the enthusiasm my dulness is so far enlightened that I can partly understand why Whitman fascinated Stevenson and other good judges. That, at least, is so much clear gain. To read Stevenson's criticisms is like revisiting a familiar country with a young traveller who sees it for the first time. He probably makes some remarks that we have heard before; but he is capable of

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1. Preface of Familiar Studies of Men and Books
 2. Saintsbury, The Novel Since 1850, p. 340

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S. Saintsbury, The Novel Since 1850, p. 345

such a thrill of surprise as Keats received from Chapman's Homer."¹

Brander Matthews, in Aspects of Fiction, calls Stevenson "a biographer and a literary critic;" W. J. Dawson, praising Stevenson for the qualities of imagination and sympathy, says, "It is by virtue of these qualities that he has written quite the best, because the truest, essay that has ever been written upon Robert Burns;"² but most of his critics concentrate on his narrative technique, and make no reference to his ability as a critic. The point is that Stevenson is not a systematic critic, and he is hardly a critic at all in the real sense of the word. He made no special studies which would have fitten him for the role of critic, and he followed no critical school of thought. His theories pertaining to narrative and narrative technique would be a valuable addition to any study of narrative, but here he is on sureground and has gained profitable experience through trial and error. In criticism, the standards and principles by which he measures and judges are those which he has raised himself. It might be significant to mention that, by his own admission, as one can verify by reading his criticism of Scott, his evaluation of the Waverley novels scarcely changed from the time when he was a young boy. At any rate, with the greatest leniency in definition, one could hardly call

1. Stephen, A Critical Essay on Robert Louis Stevenson, in volume IX of the Monterey Edition de Luxe of Stevenson's works, p. 15

2. Dawson, Makers of English Fiction, p. 261

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London letter, in a letter of 1851, to his

brother, "a literary and a literary critic," W. D. Johnson,

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1. Johnson, a critical essay on Robert Louis Stevenson, in

Volume IX of the *Complete Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, pp. 15

2. Johnson, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 201

Stevenson a critic. And, strangely enough, he hardly seems to need the title, for, whether granted the title or denied it, he yet performed, more adequately than many who are granted full right to the appellation, one of the important functions of the critic, which is to inspire the author to greater endeavor in the name of perfection. His influence on the young writers of his day, and his sincere interest in all their efforts, can be equalled in few instances. Writers with a reputation to maintain usually feel that they must guard against, and discourage, any encroachments upon their province from younger, and perhaps more talented, authors. Not so with Stevenson, and one need only read Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's tribute, written shortly after Stevenson's untimely death, to realize the extent of his influence even on those young writers who had never met him.

"For when the telegram came, early on Monday morning, what was our first thought, as soon as the immediate numbness of sorrow passed and the selfish instinct began to reassert itself and whisper 'What have I lost? What is the difference to me?' Was it not something like this? 'Put away books and paper and pen. Stevenson is dead. Stevenson is dead, and now there is nobody left to write for.' Our children and grandchildren shall rejoice in his books; but we of this generation possessed in the living man something that they will not know. So long as he lived, though it were far from Britain--though we had never spoken to him and he, perhaps, had barely heard our names--we always wrote our best for Stevenson. To him each writer amongst us--small or more than small--had been proud to have carried his best. That best might be poor enough. So long as it was not slipshod, Stevenson could forgive. While he lived,

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he moved men to put their utmost even into writings that quite certainly would never meet his eye. Surely another age will wonder over this curiosity of letters--that for five years the needle of literary endeavour in Great Britain has quivered towards a little island in the South Pacific, as to its magnetic pole. It was native in him to rejoice in the successes of other men at least as much as in his own triumphs. One almost felt that, so long as good books were written, it was no great concern to him whether he or others wrote them."¹

To read Stevenson by yourself without a critic at your elbow is pure fun, although I take the privilege of withholding from that category of "pure fun" his essays which pertain to the technical elements of literature, but to read critical estimates of him as a man and as a writer is to court bewilderment and a violent headache. After a while, you start wondering if everybody is talking about the same man, for by the law of common sense even the versatile Stevenson cannot possible have been the embodiment of all diagonally opposed virtues and vices. He had to be either one thing or the other, sincere or an inveterate poser, a serious artist or a dauber. The critics cannot seem to agree, and in the meantime, the battle wages on. For the most part, his critics do not criticize him in a constructive sense; they fight about him like so many puppies contending over a bone. Either they tend to praise him in superlatives beyond the bounds of all reason, or else they leave him with practically nothing except the recognized charm of his personality. The man has had so many enthusiastic followers,

1. Quiller-Couch, Adventures in Criticism, p. 96

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and his charm has been exploited to such a degree, that clear-minded critics have to use up half of their space trying to show the need for dispassionate criticism based on the intrinsic value of his work without allowing the halo of his romantically-appealing personality to confuse and to obscure the issues. In sheer self-defense, they are bound to bend the other way, misinterpreting his intentions because of distrust in the power of his personality, or else they are led to criticize the works without too much consideration of the man. And, on the whole, some of his most enthusiastic followers, who champion his cause with unbounded ardor, have unintentionally caused more damage to his reputation than all the adverse critics grouped together. The following passage, taken from Stuart Sherman, illustrates nicely how personal and petty some of Stevenson's most ardent admirers allow themselves to become under the stress of imagined wrongs to themselves and to their author.

"Inevitably the long crusade of the anti-Stevensonians against him, his character, and his art, and against us--the Stevensonians--our character and our taste, infuriates me. All of them, from the atrabilious W. E. Henley to Messrs. Swinnerton, Steuart and Hellman--all of them say such nasty things about us: about our author and his readers. And to lapse a little into the Elizabethan style of my youth, most of these things which Mr. Swinnerton says about Stevenson seem to me 'as false as hell,' and for saying them I could 'eat his heart in the market-place.'"1

1. Sherman, Critical Woodcuts, pp. 161-163

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At any rate, a critical estimate of Stevenson's place in literature is not the purpose of this study. Let it suffice to say that he was a very serious artist who thought much about the problems of his art and who devoted himself to its practice and to its betterment without thought of self. And whatever place time may grant him among the great and the near great, he will always be remembered for the charm of the personality radiating from every page of his work, for the gospel of joy and courage which he tried to preach; and, most of all, he will be remembered as the gallant champion of romance.

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VII. Digest

The plan followed in this dissertation was to examine Stevenson's prose works, including his innumerable letters, with the aim of collecting his literary critical theories found there, and submitting them to a process of systematization and analysis. The survey does not include his ideas pertaining to poetry, (which are negligible at best, since, for the most part, he indulged in the writing of poetry only as a pastime, an anodyne to pain, when ill health prevented him from working at his beloved prose), but places special emphasis upon his theories concerning prose and the problems of prose technique. The first sections of the thesis deal with Stevenson's general theories of art and of literature; the main body of the work is devoted to a detailed examination of his theories concerning narrative prose technique, with special reference to the novel and the short story, and includes a discussion of the aims and limitations of the drama, history, biography, and the fable; and the concluding chapters concern themselves with Stevenson's estimate of the critic's desirable attributes, a compilation of Stevenson's criticism of specific prose writers, and an evaluation of Stevenson's critical theories and of Stevenson himself in the role of critic.

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Stevenson has been called "the writer's writer," but it would be more exact to call him "the apprentice or the incipient writer's writer." His interest in discussing a work of literature centers not so much on the finished product as on the technical manoeuvres, one might say, by which the work was accomplished, and he is forever exposing the pulleys of the machinery for the inexperienced writer's benefit. His essays, and this thesis, therefore, abound with many admonitions and words of advice addressed to the young writer with the aim of making his progress from amateur to full-fledged professional more efficient and more direct.

Stevenson looks on art as a pleasure which the artist turns into a trade. It is a pleasure because the artist, supposedly, is so devoted to his art that its practice, in spite of the fact that it entails arduous labor and many "lost pains," is a source of continual satisfaction to him; it is a trade, or a craft, because its rudiments must be learned consciously by the novice. The function of any art is to make a pattern of some sort, and the artist is not ready for the actual process of creation until he has learned the technical principles which pertain to the production of the pattern of his chosen art. In other words, the artist must be thoroughly familiar with his tools, and he

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must have practised a great deal with them, before he attempts to use them for the purpose of representation. And once he has passed beyond the stage of apprenticeship, or "snoozing," which means to learn the rudiments of an art as though they were an absolute end in themselves, he should strive for two things--significance and charm.

No art attempts to compete with life in its immensity, and therein lies the power of art. Instead of vying with life, which is infinite, chaotic, and apparently illogical, the artist works by selection, concentrating only on those aspects of it which seem the most important to him, and through judicious selection and omission he succeeds in producing a work of art which is finite, reasoned, and significant.

Stevenson refutes the heresy that art need have a conscious moral aim. The best teachers, in his estimation, are not those who set out to teach, but those who teach unconsciously by communicating the best in themselves. He realizes that morality is a factor in art, but that which he acknowledges is broad and magnanimous, and entirely opposed to the spirit of "puritan morality." Whatever his aim, however, the sincere artist should be completely absorbed in his art and devoted to it. If he has a real

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vocation for art, it never occurs to him to question whether what he is doing is worth the effort. Although Stevenson occasionally exclaims against the pettiness of the exclusive artist, the standards of perfection and devotion which he prescribes for the artist, and which he follows himself, incidentally, leave no time for the artist to do anything else. It follows that the artist must have an aspiration, an ideal of perfection, which spurs him on to greater and greater effort.

Realism and idealism strive for the same ends--charm and significance, and are differentiated only by method. The realist stresses detail, sometimes inordinately, while the idealist tends to suppress it. The highest order of creative art consists of a combination of the two methods. The immediate danger of the realist is that he will come to think any fact, however tedious or irrelevant, worth including, that of the idealist is that he will become too abstract and vague. Stevenson, with his passion for condensation, excision, and omission, one might almost say, is opposed to realism because, as he says, it entails a multiplicity of detail. Moreover, he has no patience with those extreme realists who miss the spirit of joy which has endured in all men and who busy themselves with the portrayal of the revolting aspects

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of life. He practically challenges them to show a justification for their existence, and he asserts that the true realism is that which can recognize the poetry which exists in the world and in the most miserable of men. On the other hand, as Clayton Hamilton says, "he blows blasts on the trumpet of romance." Romance, the pictorial romance of stirring incident in the right kind of setting, is one of the desires of man, and it is a factor with which any lively literature has to contend. As an example of the importance of romance, Stevenson cites Clarissa Harlowe which is practically forgotten, in spite of its many qualities, because it lacks this one quality of "picture-making scenes," while Robinson Crusoe lives on because of it.

Stevenson is particularly interested in narrative, which he thinks is the most typical mood of literature, and in narrative technique. His interest ranges from the drama, in which his knowledge of technique is rather limited, to the method of writing critical studies. The novel, the short story, the fable, biography, and history, all, to a certain extent, come under his scrutiny. Whether the narrator deals with real or imaginary events, the principles of narrative are the same in all cases where the writer's purpose is to narrate.

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Stevenson is particularly interested in narrative, which he thinks is the most typical mood of literature, and in narrative technique. His interest ranges from the drama, in which his knowledge of technique is rather limited, to the method of writing critical studies. The novel, the short story, the fable, biography, and history, all, to a certain extent, come under his scrutiny. Whether the narrator deals with real or imaginary events, the principles of narrative are the same in all cases where the writer's purpose is to narrate.

Learning to write, according to Stevenson, is a long and arduous process, demanding much practice and hard work. The only method of learning is by the continual imitation of good models. That is the way Stevenson himself learned, and he thinks that it is the only way. No writer writes well by accident. If a man writes well, it is because he is thoroughly familiar with the elements which constitute a good prose style. In his essay, On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature, Stevenson makes a minute analysis of those elements, carrying his analysis down to an examination of the pattern of letters. Style is synthetic, and that style is the best which has the greatest implication of philosophy and wit.

Stevenson thinks that the greatest limitation in the writing of short critical essays is that the author has to condense with a vengeance, and that he is forced to view his subject from a certain point of view and from that point of view only. Because he has to condense so drastically, the things which he says are given undue prominence by the omission of those which he is forced to exclude, and that in itself is enough to give a spurious note to the work. At any rate, the critic's main tool should be sympathy, the critic should look for merits rather than for faults, and he should judge a work of art as a whole. Stevenson himself

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wrote several critical essays, and while he is confident and assertive on matters pertaining to narrative technique, on the whole he is too scrupulously diffident in his desire to be absolutely fair to the person whom he is discussing, his knowledge is rather limited, and he is not ruthless enough to make a very convincing critic. But whether he is called a critic or denied the title, Stevenson performed one of the critic's important functions in spurring on the younger writers of his generation to greater endeavor in the name of perfection.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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I attended St. George's Parochial School in Manchester, and spent a year in Stanstead, Canada, at the Ursuline Convent which is located there.

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